



University of
Zurich^{UZH}

Institute of Sociology

A Rational Choice Explanation of Migrant Transnationalism

Jörg Rössel & Julia H. Schroedter

Rational Choice Sociology: Theory and Empirical Applications
Seminar in cooperation with Venice International University, San Servolo
November 16-18, 2015



Outline

1. Introduction and Research Questions
2. Theoretical background
3. Methods and Data
4. Empirical Results
5. Summary and Discussion



1. Introduction and Research Questions

- The term transnationalism is defined by the existence of relations/exchanges between actors in different countries.
- Transnational relations exist in different areas of social life: politics, economics, family and friendship relations, identification etc.
- In our paper we focus on migrant transnationalism, i. e. transnational relations of migrants to their country of origin (CoO).
- Such transnational relations of migrants are often contrasted with classical approaches on migrant assimilation, which usually study migrants' relations to actors in their country of residence (CoR) in different dimensions.



1. Introduction and Research Questions

- In our study we focus on migrants' interest in politics, both in their CoO and their CoR, thus combining a perspective on transnationalism with a classical assimilation perspective.
- Specifically, we want to explain the interest in politics in the CoO as well as in the CoR.
- Most current explanations of migrant transnationalism are so-called factor explanations, focusing on the context factors in the CoO and the CoR as well as on the resource endowment of migrants (skills, language, etc.).
- We attempt to develop a consistent explanation based on RC theory and test it empirically with survey data from Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.



2. Theoretical background: Rational Choice Explanation of Migrant Transnationalism

- The terms transnationalism and transnationalisation were introduced into social-scientific vocabulary in the 1990s.
- On the one hand, they were used to describe the increasing connectedness and exchanges between national societies (De Swaan 1995; Gerhards/Rössel 1999).
- On the other, they were introduced by qualitative researchers in the field of migration and integration (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992; Pries 2010). They criticized previous migration research for its focus on one-way migration and assimilation approaches.
- “Transnationalists” argued that contemporary migration differs qualitatively from previous migration by including return migration, back-and-forth migration, and especially by the dense transnational relations to the CoO upheld by migrants.



2. Theoretical background: Rational Choice Explanation of Migrant Transnationalism

- The existence of such phenomena has been mainly shown in qualitative research (sampling on the dependent), whereas quantitative studies led to much more heterogeneous results (Rössel/Schroedter 2015 for Switzerland).
- There are strong differences in the degree of transnational relations between various groups of migrants, in different CoRs, in different fields of transnational exchange (politics, economics, family and friends) and between different individuals within the same group.
- In our paper we want to focus especially on the individual differences in the degree of transnational political interest (compared with individual differences in interest in the politics of the CoR).
- Previous explanations are mainly so-called factor explanations focusing on various factors to explain interest or participation in the politics of the CoR or the CoO.



2. Theoretical background: Rational Choice Explanation of Migrant Transnationalism

- Important factors are: Political context of the CoO (e. g. right to vote in CoO), political context of the CoR (e. g. right to vote or participate), generation (ties to the CoO usually decrease with generation), resources (skills, economic capital) to support organizations and campaigns in the CoO.
- We assume that these factor explanations can be easily unified by adopting a rational choice approach, which assumes that actors maximize their utility under constraints, thus weighing costs and benefits of different alternatives (see Esser, Kalter, Schunck).
- We link this theoretical approach by several bridge assumptions to the explanation of political interest in the CoO (and CoR). The mechanisms are mainly based on the relevance of political participation/decisions for oneself (benefits) and on the cost of gathering political information.



2. Theoretical background: Rational Choice Explanation of Migrant Transnationalism

- Citizenship: Having the citizenship of the CoR strongly increases the benefits of being interested in politics in the CoR (lifts restrictions on participation, increases the relevance of politics in the CoR for oneself):
 - → H1: Having the citizenship of the CoR (or a spouse or children with this citizenship) increases interest in the politics of the CoR (not relevant for CoO).
- Highest degree: Finishing the highest school degree in the CoR (CoO) increases knowledge about politics in the CoR (CoO) and lowers costs of gathering political information in the CoR (CoO).
 - → H2: Having finished the highest school degree in the CoR (CoO) increases interest in the politics of the CoR (CoO).



2. Theoretical background: Rational Choice Explanation of Migrant Transnationalism

- Relatives/friends: having friends from CoO and relatives from CoO in the CoR increases the costs of gathering political information, since it reduces communication with the autochthonous population and thus talk about politics in the CoR.
- → H3: The more friends/relatives from CoO one has, the less one is interested in politics in the CoR (the more one is interested in politics in CoO).
- Language: Knowledge and use of the language of the CoR lowers costs of gathering political information.
- → H4: Higher proficiency and use of the language of the CoR (having the language as mother tongue, speaking it with partner, speaking it at work) increases interest in the politics of the CoR (not relevant for CoO).



2. Theoretical background: Rational Choice Explanation of Migrant Transnationalism

- Real estate property: Having real estate in the CoR (CoO) increases benefits of political participation and thus of political interests in the CoR (CoO).
- → Having real estate property in the CoR (CoO) increases interest in the politics of the CoR (CoR).



3. Methods and Data: EUMARR-Survey

- Survey data collected in Zurich (CH), Antwerp, Brussels (BE), Amsterdam and The Hague (NL) in 2012
 - Part of a larger European study (EUMARR) incl. Spain
 - Sample includes middle-aged persons in mono- and binational partnerships (BE & NL: “natives”-EU27 citizens; CH: Swiss-EU27; Swiss-non-EU, EU27-EU27)
 - Online and postal survey with a recourse of 32-40 %
- ⇒ Selection: only individuals born abroad (no citizenship of CoR at birth!), only heterosexual partnerships



4. Empirical Results: Quantitative Analysis

DVs:

- (1) Interest in politics in country of residence (CoR) [range: 1-5]
- (2) Interest in politics in country of birth (CoB) [range: 1-5]
- (3) Difference between interest in CoR and CoB (CoR – CoB) [range: -4 to 4]

Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics in...

	Not at All	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely	Don't know
Zurich?	<input type="radio"/>					
Switzerland?	<input type="radio"/>					
The European Union?	<input type="radio"/>					
The rest of the world?	<input type="radio"/>					
Your country of birth (France)?	<input type="radio"/>					



3. Methods and Data: EUMARR-Survey

IV:

- Citizenship of respondent: CoR vs.other
- Citizenship of partner: CoR vs.other
- Children with Swiss partner (only current partnership!): Y/N
- Country of highest educational degree: (1) CoO, (2) CoR, (3) other country
- Percentage of friends with same CoO beyond the (max.5) best friends in CoR
- Mother tongue is language of CoR: Y/N
- Relatives in CoR (apart from the own household): Y/N
- Real estate property in CoR/in CoO: Y/N
- Language mainly spoken with partner is language of CoR: Y/N
- Language mainly spoken at work is language of CoR: Y/N



University of
Zurich^{UZH}

Institute of Sociology

4. Empirical Results



4. Results: Determinants of Interest in Politics

	<i>Politics in CoR</i>		<i>Politics in CoO</i>		<i>Difference CoR-CoO</i>	
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	R.SE.	β	R.SE.	β	R.SE.
Nationality CoR	0.45***	0.12	0.00	0.14	0.45***	0.13
Nationality of partner CoR	0.18*	0.07	0.02	0.08	0.16*	0.08
Child(ren) with CoR	-0.29*	0.13	-0.16	0.16	-0.12	0.15
Highest degree (Rf. CoO)						
CoR	0.12	0.07	-0.23**	0.07	0.35***	0.07
Other country	0.06	0.09	-0.35***	0.10	0.41***	0.10
Percent friends same CoO	-0.00*	0.00	0.00***	0.00	-0.01***	0.00
Relatives in CoR	0.11	0.07	-0.13	0.08	0.22**	0.07
Mother tongue = CoR	0.18**	0.07	-0.13	0.07	0.30***	0.07
Language with partner = CoR	0.20**	0.07	0.06	0.08	0.14	0.07
Language at work = CoR	0.05	0.07	-0.13	0.07	0.19**	0.07
Property in CoR	0.00	0.07	-0.08	0.08	0.09	0.08
Property in CoO	-0.08	0.08	0.03	0.09	-0.11	0.09
Constant	3.02***	0.08	3.80***	0.09	-0.78***	0.10
R ²	0.15		0.12		0.21	
AIC	3160.42		3381.60		3345.97	
BIC	3272.42		3493.60		3457.90	
N	1,201		1,201		1,197	

Source: Belgian, Dutch and Swiss EUMARR survey 2012, OLS regression with robust standard errors (controlled for city, age, gender and level of education), * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001



4. Results: Determinants of Interest in Politics

	Interest in Politics in CoR	Interest in Politics in CoO	Difference
H1 (Citizenship)			
Citizenship of CoR	✓	✓	✓
Partner with citizenship of CoR	✓	✓	✓
Children with citizenship of CoR	✗	✓	✗
H2 (Degree)			
Highest degree CoR	✗	--	✓
H3 (Relatives/friends)			
% friends same CoO	✓	✓	✓
Relatives in CoR	✗	✗	✓
H4 (Language)			
Mother tongue	✓	✓	✓
Language with partner	✓	✓	✗
Language at work	✗	✓	✓
H5 (Property)			
Property CoO	✗	✗	✗
Property CoR	✗	✗	✗



5. Summary and Discussion

- We studied the determinants of migrants' interest in the politics of their CoR and their CoO based on a rational choice framework. Based on bridge assumptions we developed five hypotheses and tested them based on survey data from Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland.
- H1: Citizenship: Having the citizenship of the CoR increases interest in the politics of the CoR, but does not decrease interest in the politics of the CoO (exception: having kids with citizenship of CoR).
- H2: Degree: Finishing the highest degree in the CoR decreases interest in politics of the CoO, but does not increase interest in politics of the CoR.
- H3: Relatives/friends: Having friends (relatives) from the CoO reduces interests in the politics of the CoR and increases interest in the politics of the CoO.



5. Summary and Discussion

- H4: Language: Being proficient in the language of the CoR increases interest in politics of the CoR, but does not decrease interest in the politics of the CoO (especially for mother tongue, weaker for language with partner and at work).
- H5: Real estate property: Having real estate in the CoR (CoO) does not increase interest in politics in the CoR (CoO).
- Transnational political interest and interest in the politics of the CoR and CoO varies strongly with other indicators of social and cultural integration in CoR (and transnational relations to CoO)! The relationship can be very well explained by applying a simple version of RC theory.
- However:
- We have to be more precise with our bridge assumptions and give them a better foundation in the political science literature on political interest.



5. Summary and Discussion

- We should also discuss country differences, not only individual differences.
- This analysis was based on a list-wise deletion of missing values, in the next step we will apply imputation of missing data.
- This is a preliminary study, in the upcoming months we gather more differentiated data in a survey on transnational relations of migrants and non-migrants in Switzerland covering several dimensions of transnational exchange and measuring costs and benefits directly (and not indirectly, as we did here).



6. References

- De Swaan, A. (1995). Die soziologische Untersuchung der transnationalen Gesellschaft. *Journal für Sozialforschung* 35: 107–120.
- Gerhards, J., Rössel, J. (1999). Zur Transnationalisierung der Gesellschaft der Bundesrepublik. *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 28 (5): 325–344.
- Glick Schiller, N. Basch, L., Blanc Szanton, C. (1992). *Towards a transnational perspective on migration: race, class, ethnicity and nationalism reconsidered*, New York: New York Academy of Sciences.
- Pries, L. (2010). *Transnationalisierung. Theorie und Empirie neuer Vergesellschaftung*. Wiesbaden: VS.
- Rössel, J., Schroedter, J.H. (2015). *Cosmopolitan Cultural Consumption. Preferences and Practices in an Heterogenous, Urban Population in Switzerland*. *Poetics* 50: 80–95.
- Schroedter, J.H.; Rössel, J. (2014). *Europeanisation without the European Union? The Case of Bi-National Marriages in Switzerland*. *Population, Space and Place* 20 (2): 139–156.



**Thank you very much
for your attention!**

Contact:

Jörg Rössel

roessel@soziologie.uzh.ch

Julia Schroedter

schroedter@soziologie.uzh.ch



Means of Dependent Variables by Country

	Mean	Std. Err.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
<i>Interest in Politics CoR</i>				
Belgium	3,09	0,06	2,96	3,21
Netherlands	3,13	0,05	3,02	3,23
Switzerland	3,16	0,04	3,08	3,23
<i>Interest in Politics CoO</i>				
Belgium	3,41	0,07	3,27	3,55
Netherlands	3,07	0,06	2,96	3,18
Switzerland	3,42	0,04	3,34	3,49
<i>Interest in Politics Dif. CoR-CoO</i>				
Belgium	-0,33	0,07	-0,46	-0,20
Netherlands	0,05	0,06	-0,06	0,17
Switzerland	-0,26	0,04	-0,34	-0,18

Table A1: Overview of Variables

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
<i>Interest in Politics CoR</i>	3.14	0.96	1	5
<i>Interest in Politics CoO</i>	3.34	1.04	1	5
<i>Interest in Politics Dif. CoR-CoO</i>	-0.20	1.08	-4	4
City (Rf. Zurich)				
Antwerp	0.08	0.27	0	1
Brussels	0.08	0.26	0	1
The Hague	0.12	0.33	0	1
Amsterdam	0.11	0.31	0	1
Age (cent. 37)	-0.03	4.76	-13	20
Gender (Rf. male)	0.60	0.49	0	1
Level of education (Rf. high)				
Low	0.09	0.28	0	1
Middle	0.17	0.37	0	1
Highest (PhD)	0.14	0.34	0	1
Nationality CoR	0.15	0.36	0	1
Nationality of partner CoR	0.75	0.43	0	1
Child(ren) with Swiss	0.10	0.30	0	1
Highest degree (Rf. CoO)				
CoR	0.28	0.45	0	1
Other country	0.12	0.32	0	1
Share of friends with same CoO	25.19	27.78	0	100
Relatives in CoR	0.23	0.42	0	1
Mother tongue = language CoR	0.38	0.49	0	1
Language with partner = CoR	0.61	0.49	0	1
Language at work = CoR	0.69	0.46	0	1
Property in CoR	0.42	0.49	0	1
Property in CoO	0.14	0.35	0	1

Source: Belgian, Dutch and Swiss EUMARR survey 2012, n =1,197

Table 1: Determinants of Interest in Politics

	Politics in CoR		Politics in CoO		Difference CoR-CoO	
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	R.SE.	β	R.SE.	β	R.SE.
City (Rf. Zurich)						
Antwerp	-0.17	0.10	-0.07	0.11	-0.12	0.10
Brussels	-0.26*	0.11	0.20	0.12	-0.46***	0.12
The Hague	-0.01	0.10	-0.35**	0.11	0.31**	0.11
Amsterdam	-0.03	0.11	-0.36**	0.11	0.32**	0.12
Age (cent. 37)	0.02***	0.01	0.01*	0.01	0.01	0.01
Gender (Rf. male)	-0.35***	0.06	-0.28***	0.06	-0.07	0.06
Level of education (Rf. high)						
Low	-0.30**	0.11	-0.37**	0.11	0.08	0.11
Middle	-0.21**	0.08	-0.18*	0.08	-0.02	0.08
Highest (PhD)	0.18*	0.08	0.14	0.09	0.04	0.09
Nationality CoR	0.45***	0.12	0.00	0.14	0.45***	0.13
Nationality of partner CoR	0.18*	0.07	0.02	0.08	0.16*	0.08
Child(ren) with Swiss	-0.29*	0.13	-0.16	0.16	-0.12	0.15
Highest degree (Rf. CoO)						
CoR	0.12	0.07	-0.23**	0.07	0.35***	0.07
Other country	0.06	0.09	-0.35***	0.10	0.41***	0.10
Share of friends with same CoO	-0.00*	0.00	0.00***	0.00	-0.01***	0.00
Relatives in CoR	0.11	0.07	-0.13	0.08	0.22**	0.07
Mother tongue = language CoR	0.18**	0.07	-0.13	0.07	0.30***	0.07
Language with partner = CoR	0.20**	0.07	0.06	0.08	0.14	0.07
Language at work = CoR	0.05	0.07	-0.13	0.07	0.19**	0.07
Property in CoR	0.00	0.07	-0.08	0.08	0.09	0.08
Property in CoO	-0.08	0.08	0.03	0.09	-0.11	0.09
Constant	3.02***	0.08	3.80***	0.09	-0.78***	0.10
R ²		0.15		0.12		0.21
AIC		3160.42		3381.60		3345.97
BIC		3272.42		3493.60		3457.90
N		1,201		1,201		1,197

Source: Belgian, Dutch and Swiss EUMARR survey 2012, OLS regression with robust standard errors, * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001