
Studying transnationalism

On the empirical assessment and the overarching connections between diverse transnational activities

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1 The Problem

New patterns of migratory movements are nowadays influencing families in large parts of Europe. Migration represents a considerable tension for social ties even when only one family member migrates. Additionally, women are nowadays as likely to migrate to another country as first family members as men are (Schapiro et al. 2013: 48). Thus, today's transnational families face more complex situations than in the past. These changes of international mobility and their social implications are observable in all immigration countries of the world. Today's migratory movements challenge classical concepts of labor or forced migration theories. One of the most influential competing concepts in migration literature constitutes the idea of transnationalism¹. According to this concept, immigrants pursue activities and forge cultures that are not limited to one particular national context. Thus, transnationalism is of extraordinary importance for the integration process of immigrants, e.g. regarding investments and socioeconomic integration (Itzigsohn/Saucedo 2002; Ley 2013; Marcelli/Lowell 2005; Snel et al. 2006; Tsuda 2012). However, as the phenomenon's definition is extremely wide, a uniform understanding of transnational activities and their empirical assessment is complicated. Therefore, existing empirical research on transnationalism tends to be rath-

1 The terms of *transnationalism* and *transnationality* are used interchangeably in the remainder of this contribution. Further, *transmigrants*, *transnationals*, and *transnational immigrants* refer to an identical group of individuals.

er scattered and disconnected. This study engages in developing a more holistic framework for empirical research on transnationalism.

This contribution begins with presenting the theoretical foundation and current state of research on transnational activities and behaviors. Particularly, this first section reviews the empirical literature on transnationalism and presents different assessments of transnational behaviors. Subsequently, two distinct strategies of research are abstracted: one *focused* and one *comprehensive* strategy. This chapter also discusses each strategy's strengths and weaknesses. The final section discusses this contribution's implications for further research in the area of transnational activities.

2 Variety of research on transnationalism

Transnationalism surfaced in scientific discussion in the last decade of the twentieth century. In its most distilled version the definition of the term “transnational” indicates reference to more than one nation state. In the context of migration research, most common reference points are made up of immigrants' countries of origin and the receiving society. Yet, other setups are viable as well. For example, individuals may engage in more than two countries. A Spanish immigrant who resides in Belgium and travels frequently to France for business may at the same time maintain close social ties to relatives and friends in Spain, where he² periodically visits. Consistently, transnational immigrants are characterized by a “plethora of connections spanning home and host *societies*” (Waldinger/Fitzgerald 2004: 1177, emphasis added). Besides these arrangements spanning more than two nation states, individuals may also exclusively engage in countries other than their country of origin. For example, a Slovakian immigrant may live in Bulgaria and cross the border to Romania frequently, without ever returning to his country of origin. Hence, this transnational setup excludes his country of origin. The arrangement presents the prototypical transnationalist, who extends his way of living “*beyond* loyalties that connect to any specific place of origin or ethnic or national group” (Waldinger/Fitzgerald 2004: 1178, emphasis in original). Yet, most commonly, transnationalism is defined as “a set of cross-border relations and practices that connect migrants with their societies of origin” (Guarnizo 2003: 670). This contribution takes an individual micro-perspective. Therefore, it excludes transnational relations on the national, subnational, and supranational level, for example,

2 In the remainder of this study the term of *immigrant* shall refer to both male and female individuals.

between corporations or between political actors. Thus, this study focuses strictly on the individual perspective of immigrants. Transnationalism shall represent “a pattern of migration in which persons, although they move across international borders, settle and establish ongoing social relations in a new state, maintain ongoing social connections within the polity from which they originated” (Glick Schiller/Fouron 1999: 344).

The existing empirical research covers a wide array of topics and methodological approaches. The subsequent section subdivides the research area in *economic*, *political*, *social*, and *cultural and religious* transnational practices (Levitt/Jaworsky 2007) and presents corresponding studies and findings. The chosen areas necessarily represent an arbitrary selection of transnational activities. However, it tries to cover both transnationalism from above (global capital, media, and political institutions) and from below (local, grassroots activity) (Levitt/Jaworsky 2007: 132). Restricting the selection to the presented, prominent arenas of transnational activities ensures the readability of this contribution. Additionally, the subsequent section emphasizes the empirical operationalization of transnational behaviors.

2.1 Economics

Economic transnationalism largely refers to immigrant ventures regularly spanning more than one nation state. For example, this definition targets transnational entrepreneurs, according to a study of Portes and colleagues (2002: 284). There are those who travel abroad at least twice a year for business. Furthermore, transnational entrepreneurs consider the success of their firm to rely on regular contact with foreign countries, for example the country of origin. The findings indicate that 5% of all immigrants within the *Comparative Immigrant Enterprise Project* (CIEP) data are transnational entrepreneurs. This group, however, accounts for 58% of all self-employed immigrants within the sample (Portes et al. 2002: 285). Higher levels of education, years of US residency and size of social networks positively influence the probability to engage in transnational enterprises. Additionally, males engage more often in transnational entrepreneurship than females and Colombians – in comparison with Dominican and Salvadoran immigrants who are less likely to do so (Portes et al. 2002: 290). Furthermore, immigrant-owned transnational firms have a significantly larger number of employees and higher annual sales than non-transnational immigrant businesses (Wang/Liu 2015: 354ff.). Thus, transnational engagement constitutes a profitable strategy for immigrant entrepreneurs.

Another common area studies immigrant remittances to their country of origin. Although not all studies in this area are linked to the literature of transnationalism, monetary remittances are usually considered to “represent long-distance social ties of solidarity, reciprocity, and obligation that bind migrants to their kin and friends” (Guarnizo 2003: 671). In this regard, higher amounts of remittances characterize more transnational immigrants. A considerable stock of studies was able to produce the following insights. Studying foreign born Mexicans residing in Los Angeles County, Marcelli and Lowell (2005: 89) were able to show that immigrants who finished their education outside of the US are more likely to send money to Mexico. Additionally, a shorter period of residence in Los Angeles and context-characteristics, such as the population density in the place of residence and a rural home country context, significantly increase the likelihood of remitting money. Finally, participation in the receiving country’s community in terms of visiting at least one community meeting renders monetary remittances more likely (Marcelli/Lowell 2005: 89). Relying on representative data of private households in Moldova, Siegel and Lücke (2013: 127) investigated 1139 bilateral relationships between migrant and recipient households. Their research focuses on the transfer channels used to remit money, which are grouped in formal, informal, and personal channels. Bank transfers and the use of post offices represent formal services for remitting money. Informal services rely on train conductors or minibus operators to convey money across borders, while personal transfers are operated by the immigrants themselves or relatives and friends. The findings indicate that formal services of remitting money are preferred by highly educated immigrants and by those who value speed, convenience, and security of their services (Siegel/Lücke 2013: 136). Additionally, illegal residency and/or a shorter stay increase the likelihood of using informal services. In general, the presented findings indicate that highly educated immigrants send higher amounts of money to the country of origin and prefer formal transfer channels. Furthermore, the time of residence is a meaningful predictor of immigrants’ amount of remittances.

A third vein of research on economic transnationalism studies direct investment, for example in homeownership. In this regard, two differing lines of argument are possible. First, transnational individuals, as an expression of their transnationality may invest in properties in more than one country. Thus, depending on individual financial resources transmigrants accommodate to two or more countries. In this regard, the investment strategy mirrors a long-term adaptation to not a single, but multiple societal contexts (Mazzucato 2005: 7). Secondly transnational immigrants due to their individual indetermination and as a sign of their “refusal of fixity” (Vertovec 1999: 451) may avoid homeownership altogether. As they do not have long-term plans of residing anywhere permanently, the avoidance of

large-scale investments constitutes a rational strategy for transmigrants. The lines of argument, therefore, differ in their predictions on the investment in properties and homeownership. Whereas the first expects transnationals to invest in residential property in at least two countries, the second assumes them to avoid capital-intensive and long-term investment altogether. Commonly, empirical studies investigate the second approach by explaining homeownership in the receiving country with transnational relations across borders (Kuuire et al. 2015; Vono-de-Vilhena/Bayona-Carrasco 2012). For example, using data of the *Longitudinal Study of Immigrants in Canada* (LSIC) Kuuire and colleagues (2015) could substantiate that both engagement in the transfer of remittances and the amount of remittances significantly decrease the probability of immigrants' homeownership in Canada. These effects operate independently of family income and level of education. Comparable findings could be obtained for immigrants in Spain (Vono-de-Vilhena/Bayona-Carrasco 2012). Applying discrete-time logistic models on longitudinal data of the National Immigrant Survey in Spain, the authors were able to show that remitting money to the home country significantly decreases the probability of investing in homeownership in the country of residence. Furthermore, home-owning immigrants are characterized by high educational levels and the intention to reside in Spain for the next five years (Vono-de-Vilhena/Bayona-Carrasco 2012: 109ff.). Investment in more than one country has been studied as well. Relying on nine life history interviews with Caribbean informants based in Birmingham and London, Joseph (2010) was able to show that investments in the home country and the UK are highly interrelated. On the one hand a certain share of respondents felt unsure whether they should establish multiple residencies or whether they should return to the Caribbean permanently. In this regard, selling UK property was perceived as a burning of bridges, as it would diminish the chances of returning. On the other hand, those respondents who already established multiple residencies dismissed the idea of returning to the home country for good. As those who have accumulated sufficient financial resources for homeownership in two contexts, they actively decided to engage in transnational lifestyle. The presented findings indicate that higher levels of education and higher financial resources consistently increase the probability of engaging in economic transnational behaviors. The distinct subfields of this research area are highly interrelated, most notably remittances and homeownership. In general, economic transnationalism is commonly measured by the amount of remittances, the frequency of business-related, cross-border contacts, and monetary investment in one or more countries.

2.2 Culture and Religion

The most modest form of *cultural* transnationalism refers to (fluent) bilingualism or multinational consumption behaviors. Yet, these measures do not distinctively discriminate between transmigrants and traditional immigrants as arguably both groups prefer the native language at home and speak the host language outside (Portes & Hao 1998; Portes & Schauffler 1994). In addition, a cosmopolitan and multicultural stance to consumption, as for example with regard to cuisine, art, and fashion, is neither a distinct feature of transnationals nor of individuals with migratory experience. In order to discuss cultural transnationalism, the inherently problematic term of *culture* requires elaboration first. Culture – usually in contrast to nature – refers to man-made concepts, such as values, beliefs, customs, and rituals (Lazear 1999: 96). In terms of cultural identity, it may relate to a “sort of collective ‘one true self’ (...), which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (Hall 1990: 223). This definition strongly resembles the common notion of an ethnic group, whose members are interrelated by the belief of a common origin (Weber 2006: 367). Consistently, ethnic groups are frequently defined in cultural terms, they refer to “a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients” (Yinger 1976: 200). Studies on cultural and religious transnationalism relate to both bodily geographic and ideational behaviors. The former relate to activities that indicate an actual cross-border movement (Snel et al. 2006: 286). In contrast, the latter behaviors may be performed without physically crossing a border. Bodily geographic cultural transnationalism frequently relates to practices for which immigrants travel to their original community on a regular schedule, for example celebrations of saints. Research on internationally dispersed Hindu families was able to show that these gather for weddings in a certain place, such as Lisbon (Lourenço/Cachado 2012: 59). Thus, although internal family networks span national borders, their members reunite for significant cultural and religious occasions. In this regard, cultural transnational activities are measured by cross-border mobility, and are performed for distinct cultural or religious reasons. This measurement, however, requires the corresponding studies to survey the reason of cross-border trips, besides their frequency and length. Comparable findings could be obtained for migratory movements between the United States and Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Guatemala (Burrell 2005). For the *corrida de caballos*, which is a celebration including horse races, individuals that immigrated to the US return to the home town in order to engage in this cultural festivity. In this regard, the returned community

members actively relate to their current place of residence, for example by wearing a “Stars-and-Stripes bandanna” and a “full-sized U.S. flag” (Burrell 2005: 14). Despite their strong connection to the home country, as indicated by the return visits to it, these immigrants strongly relate to the receiving country as well. This leads to another phenomenon, which is commonly subsumed under the term of cultural transnationalism: dual and hybrid identities. On this point, transnationalism as a “type of consciousness” (Vertovec 1999: 447) implies that transnationals feel linked to both countries of origin and host country. However, the majority of immigrants may eventually establish hybrid forms of identification. These include a “refusal of fixity” (Vertovec 1999: 451) as well as a “strong local element” (Vathi 2013: 909). Furthermore, the denial of a binary identification might be a strategy of coping with the individual’s feeling that full citizenship in either context might not be achievable. By examining Pakistani Muslim immigrants in Norway, Erdal (2013: 992) was able to portray the strains, which adherence to Muslim faith poses in secular societies. Yet, transmigrants’ experiences influence existing cultural activities and modify their inherent meaning. The practice of Alevi in France, Germany, and the Netherlands exemplify the revitalization of cultural practices that exert a repercussive effect on the country of origin’s society, for example Turkey, where the cultural habits of Alevi had been largely suppressed in the past. The preceding examples additionally demonstrate the blurred line between cultural and religious transnational behaviors. Religious transnational organizations connect individuals residing in different countries. Thus, they have to accommodate individual needs in diverse societal contexts. Moreover, individuals adjust their religious faiths to their ways of living, and religious organizations also adapt to problems accompanying the increasing transnational activities of immigrants. In this regard, Nagel (2010, 2014) highlights the relevance of diaspora communities in religious transformation processes. For example, transnational online forums distribute religious fatwas dealing with the specific challenges of migrants’ lives (Nagel 2014: 25). These often try to balance the restrictive rules of religion and immigrants’ everyday needs. Thus, new hybrid beliefs emerge and religious practices are influenced by intermixing aspects of sending and receiving societies’ contexts. Finally, religion spans a transnational field on its own, connecting individuals on a global scale. In this regard, empirical findings could show that for example British Pakistanis tend to return to a more basal practice of Islam in order to avoid strains between host’s and country of origin’s cultural and societal expectations (Jacobson 1997). In this respect, religion establishes membership as well as functional guidelines working on a transnational scale. In general, cultural and religious transnationalism is a highly ambiguous concept. Most empirical studies operationalize it by hybrid identities and engagement in cultural practices

and celebrations in multiple nation states. Again, the distinction between bodily geographic and ideational activities may mediate the interrelation with other dimensions of transnational behavior.

2.3 Social ties

Changes in *social* life, for example referring to friendship ties and family relations, are commonly subsumed under the term of social transnationalism. Social ties usually constitute the key characteristic of transnationalism, as defined as “social action at a distance” (Boccagni 2012: 120). Transnationalism without a social dimension is inconceivable. However, with regard to the term “transnational ties”, very diverse measures exist in the literature. Most researchers do not distinguish between social transnationalism and transnationalism in general. Thus, they utilize visits to the nation of origin, remittances, participation in home country organizations, or interest in home country politics as social transnationalism (Alcántara et al. 2015: 743; Gershon & Pantoja 2014: 333). In order to distinguish social issues from other dimensions, several studies focus on family life (Domínguez/Lubitow 2008; Lourenço/Cachado 2012; Nguyen-Akbar 2014; Olwig 2003; Peter 2010; Schans 2009; Schapiro et al. 2013). Transnational families are defined as families whose nuclear members are distributed across different national contexts. Additionally, most studies try to assess the intensity of the relationships between these members. The ethnographic work of Nguyen-Akbar (2014) on Viet Kieu (overseas Vietnamese) is based upon 70 interviews. She describes the obligations and burdens that overseas Vietnamese perceive towards their families in Vietnam. Furthermore, tensions and the ambivalent relationship between commonly wealthy Viet Kieu who return to Vietnam and their rural relatives are discussed. Particularly, the considerable lifestyle differences contribute to the described strains of family life (Nguyen-Akbar 2014: 190ff.). Comparably, Lourenço and Cachado (2012) depict transnational Hindu-Gujarati families that originated in the Indian State of Gujarat, then mostly migrated to Mozambique and finally settled in Portugal, predominantly in Lisbon. Additionally, certain families engage in a third wave of migration to the UK, mostly Leicester, Manchester, Reading, and Birmingham. Thus, many Hindu-Gujaratis represent so called “triple migrants” (Lourenço/Cachado 2012: 58, emphasis in original). Due to the allocation of family members across diverse nation states, new modes of family organization occur. Particularly, gatherings such as religious festivities and weddings in the Lisbon metropolitan area mobilize dispersed family members from India, Mozambique, and the UK. Finally, Schapiro and colleagues (2013) summarize the effects of

transnational family formation on children. Their literature review identifies two central mechanisms of influence: separation and reunification. Studies on separation investigate children's – often negative – feelings, for example anger and distress. Feelings and effects are strongly mediated by third variables, such as the age and gender of the child and the migrating parent. In this regard, research could show that Latin American boys experience greater strains than girls when their fathers had migrated. Additionally, cultural factors may mediate children's reactions to their parents' migratory decisions. Whereas Filipino adolescents describe negative feelings, neutral or positive expressions were obtained from Jamaican and Mexican children (Schapiro et al. 2013: 56). However, future research needs to identify the causal mechanisms of these differences. Besides parental migration, children may leave the home country as well, for example for educational purposes. Besides separation the eventual reunification causes tensions as well. The effects strongly depend upon timing, gender, and pre-migration conditions. Again, the consequences of reunification vary widely for transnational families. These include children expressing pride for the sacrifices their parents had made as well as struggles in accommodating to the new family life, including loss of trust among family members (Schapiro et al. 2013: 58). Hence, transnational family structures strongly influence adolescents' private life. Social transnationalism, however, may also relate to friendship networks that span across international borders. In some cases, these contacts may be conveniently maintained, as countries share a border. Thus crossing the border poses fewer problems than in cases where home and receiving country are more remote to each other. For example, members of the German minority in Poland commonly sustain ties with relatives and friends in Germany, thus living "truly 'transnational lives'" (Jasiewicz 2012: 412, emphasis in original). Although the circumstances are more difficult, Ghanaian immigrants in Amsterdam engage in transnational friendship networks as well (Mazzucato 2008, 2010). In any case, social transnationalism of this kind is usually defined by contact to close friends that live abroad. However, measuring social networks of this kind is complicated. A common survey item reads: *Do you have regular contact with friends or acquaintances abroad?* on which the respondents answer in a dichotomous yes/no manner (for example GSOEP, see Holst et al. 2010: 23). This measurement instrument is problematic for two reasons. First, it does not include information about the network size, which is highly important in appraising the extent of social relations. Second, the item's wording and its simplistic answer categories do not allow for statements about the intensity of cross-national relationships. Interpretation of regularity of contact remains in the subjective realm and thus complicates the inter-individual reliability of the responses. Utilizing the aforementioned item, Holst and colleagues (2010: 16) were able to document a

positive effect of transnational friends on the amount of remittances of female immigrants in Germany. A different stance on the measurement of transnational ties was chosen by Kraemer (2014), who conducted participant-observation with 30 core participants and their extended offline and online social networks. The online part of the study investigated individual activities on “Facebook, Skype, blogs, Twitter, and other instant messaging services” (Kraemer 2014: 60). The findings indicate that offline and online contacts and networks reciprocally reinforce each other. Thus social media contacts complement existing transnational (offline) relations (Kraemer 2014: 73). However, as participants do not know all online friends in person, averaging 60% of their Facebook friends, these connections partly represent ideational ties (Kraemer 2014: 65). Ideational transnational contacts are defined as social ties to individuals in multiple nation states that may be maintained without ever physically crossing borders. The presented findings on social transnationalism underpinned the crucial role of recent developments in mass communication in facilitating long-lasting social contact across international borders. The measurements are mostly restricted to ongoing contacts with relatives and friends living in a different nation state to the current residence. However, all presented measurement instruments fail to reliably assess the intensity of contact. Some immigrants may maintain contacts only via email, while others may visit friends and relatives several times per year. Yet, both cases are covered under regular contact with friends and acquaintances abroad. The gradual differences between these, however, may be highly relevant for explaining the impact of social transnational ties on other transnational activities of immigrants.

2.4 Political activism

The *political* arena of transnationalism is one of the most regarded in academia and public. It builds an original constituting factor of the phenomenon (Agarwala 2012; Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Guarnizo 1994; Guarnizo et al. 2003). A substantial corpus of studies investigates large-scale political linkages across borders. Policies (Erkkilä 2014) as well as institutions and actors (Holmes 2014; Niederhafner 2014; Østergaard-Nielsen 2011) may outreach international borders. This contribution, however, focuses on the individual level. In this regard, political transnationals are commonly defined as active members of political parties and civic organizations in both their home and receiving country. Hence, they frequently speak out on societal issues in both countries of reference. Furthermore, transnational strategies may empower people to overcome and criticize restrictions they suffer in a single nation state. Social activism on climate change (Hadden 2014), gender

equality (Hughes et al. 2015), and LGBTQ politics (Binnie/Klesse 2013) represent prevalent fields of research. However, these studies commonly do not measure transnational interrelations, but a priori assume certain organizations – usually NGOs – represent transnational actors. In this regard, these studies restrict their analyses to ideational transnational ties. Individuals who engage in transnational organizations share common interests, ideas, and goals that go beyond single nation states. However, their members may pursue these common goals without ever leaving their home countries. Other studies focus on active engagement in political and civic organizations in multiple nation states. For example, Guarnizo and colleagues (2003: 1223) distinguish between transnational electoral and nonelectoral participation. The former term is operationalized by membership in a home country political party, monetary contributions to these parties, and participation in home country electoral campaigns and rallies. In contrast, nonelectoral participation refers to membership in civic hometown associations, the provision of money for home country community projects, and membership in charity organizations that engage in the country of origin (Guarnizo et al. 2003: 1227). The authors define transmigrants as a “new class of immigrants, economic entrepreneurs or political activists who conduct cross-border activities on a *regular* basis” (Guarnizo et al. 2003: 1213, emphasis in original). All items are surveyed on three-point scales with the answer categories: never, occasionally, and regularly. Their data comprise immigrants from Colombia, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic who reside in the U.S. In multivariate analyses the authors apply negative binomial regression models on these indicators of transnational political activities. In this regard, the dependent variable counts the number of regularly conducted activities. The findings indicate that high human capital and larger social networks increase political transnationalism. In addition, age is related to transnational activities in a reverse U-shape functional form. Transnationalism increases up to a certain age and then continuously decreases in old age. Finally, the number of years of residence in the US positively influences immigrants’ transnational participation. Further research studied transnational linkages of Chinese citizens via cyber-space. Zhang and Nyíri (2014) coined the term “netizens” for Chinese Internet users, who are spread worldwide and engage in political campaigning and support for China. Through shared interests, these netizens constitute a transnational space that spans China and countries such as Australia, France, Germany, and the US. The authors present ample examples of cooperation between mainland and overseas Chinese, such as in criticizing European one-sided media coverage on the Tibetan Uprising Day (Zhang/Nyíri 2014: 117f.). These transnational netizens distinguish themselves from earlier generations of citizens as they “actively seek information from various sources” and highly value “independent thinking and creative self-expression”

(Zhang/Nyíri 2014: 126f.). In contrast, Boccagni (2011) focused on the attempts of the Ecuadorian government in fostering transnational activities of Ecuadorian immigrants. Most notably, the government tries to “enhance channels for migrants’ savings and, potentially, investments back home” (Boccagni 2011: 321). Thus the acknowledgement of a political transnational space may perpetuate and fortify economic transnational activities. The potentials of mobilizing ethnic communities worldwide have been recognized by political leaders as well. As a result, politicians of sending countries host electoral events in countries of arrival, while at the same time leaders of the host countries try to activate the potential constituency for elections on lower – such as local – levels. For example, the political representation of the Salvadoran diaspora is reflected in its denotation as ‘Departamento 15’ besides the fourteen departments of El Salvador itself (Rodríguez 2005). The presented studies indicate that political transnationalism may best be surveyed by participation in political and civic organizations and events that span international borders. However, several studies delimit the scope of the phenomenon to ideational interactions between mainland and diaspora citizens. In order to study political transnationalism in a strict sense, active individual engagement across international borders represents a more reliable indicator.

3 Two distinct strategies of studying transnational activities

The literature review exposed that transnationalism refers to very diverse aspects of individuals’ lives. Note that the four chosen fields represent an arbitrary (yet necessary) choice. Thus, by including even more areas, the complexity of research on transnationalism would have increased significantly. However, the presented studies on economic, cultural and religious, social, and political transnational activities featured two distinct characteristics in their operational definitions of transnationalism: First, transnational activities of interest have to be conducted on a regular schedule. Remitting money once or travelling to a country twice does not establish a transnational phenomenon. Second, transnationalism is regarded as an enduring phenomenon. Therefore, activities associated with it should not gradually vanish in the course of time. The exact period of time remains unspecified, yet it may be argued that transnational lifestyles establish in a lifelong manner, thus covering the whole adulthood of individuals. Hence, *regular* and *persistent* cross-border activities (of any kind) are considered the *core* of transnationalism, connecting most of the different arenas of research on this issue (Portes et al. 1999: 219). However, as Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004: 1178) pointed out, this defi-

inition “makes freedom of movement the point of departure, as if this were not a world divided by states”. This assumption is inherently problematic. For example, European immigrants are considerably less restricted in travelling within Europe than third-country members. Thus empirical studies need to account for these restrictions and cover irregular and illegal migration more reliably.

The presented studies, however, diverged significantly with regard to the approaches of researching transnationalism. Two distinct research strategies can be identified: a *focused* and a *comprehensive* strategy. As the literature review has shown, transnational activities relate to a great diversity of behaviors. Therefore, researchers that apply a *focused* strategy delimit their analyses to distinct transnational activities. This is also reflected in the chosen wording, relating to distinct dimensions rather than to transnationalism in general, such as transnational activism (Agarwala 2012; Binnie & Klesse 2013), transnational entrepreneurship (Bagwell 2015; Portes et al. 2002), and transnational families (Lourenço/Cachado 2012; Nguyen-Akbar 2014; Schans 2009). Focused studies facilitate in-depth understanding of immigrants’ engagement in certain transnational behaviors. In addition, they avoid overcomplicating issues by restricting their research to distinct areas of transnationalism. Yet, little is known about the interrelation of different transnational dimensions. As *focused* studies, by definition, are restricted to certain areas of transnational behaviors, they do not permit insight into the overall interconnections of such. Thus, *comprehensive* studies are needed. These jointly cover different areas of transnational activities and aim at either revealing their interrelations or at formulating general statements about transnationalism. However, *comprehensive* studies are systematically underrepresented in research on transnational activities. Among the presented studies, few tried to present a holistic picture of transnationalism (see Mau et al. 2008; Snel et al. 2006). Consistently, “neither transnationalism as a condition of being, nor *transmigrants*, as a distinctive class of people, is commonly found” (Waldinger 2008: 3, emphasis in original). According to a strict perspective in favor of focused research, studies on the overall interlinkages of transnational activities are neither necessary nor meaningful. This contribution, however, disagrees with this view for two reasons.

First, most empirical research is based upon restricted samples, such as Latin American immigrants (Waldinger 2008)³ or former guest workers (Constant/Zimmermann 2012). Thus research on other groups or national contexts may end up with considerably diverging insights. Additionally, at least some, if not all, transnational activities may relate to each other. For example, existing research could

3 Immigrants from Mexico, Cuba, Colombia, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic residing in the U.S. constitute approximately 80 % of Waldinger’s (2008) sample.

show that political and social-cultural activities in the country of origin predict identification with compatriots (Snel et al. 2006). Thus, political and cultural transnationalism seem to be positively related to each other. In contrast, professional economic activities in the home country do not influence immigrants' identities (Snel et al. 2006: 298). Moreover, empirical research on the European Union seems promising. Existing research was able to substantiate that due to free movement of EU nationals, these are more mobile than immigrants, which face more rigid restrictions in crossing borders (Constant/Zimmermann 2012). Transnational behaviors of any kind are therefore more prevalent among Europeans within Europe than among third country members.

Second, it seems reasonable to separate bodily geographic from other forms of transnational behaviors. In this regard, empirical and theoretical research needs to identify the common causes underlying transnational activities. Despite the huge stock of empirical studies, sociologists know astonishingly little about the causal determinants of transnational engagement. Commonly family members in the home country, high educational levels, and sufficient financial resources are utilized in order to explain behaviors that span borders, yet the underlying causal mechanisms need elaboration. Their identification should facilitate sounder understanding of transnational activities. In this regard, besides more rigorous empirical studies, theoretical research is needed as well.

For these reasons a more holistic approach to research on immigrant transnationalism constitutes an auspicious strategy. Particularly, empirical studies should utilize more sophisticated statistical tools, such as latent structure modelling, to establish common ground of transnational activities. In this regard, cluster analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, latent class analysis, structural equation modelling, and factor mixture analyses could strongly enrich the research agenda (Clark et al. 2013). These models allow the identifying and testing of latent structures underlying distinct observable items. The huge advantage of these models comes from their capability in identifying common and unobservable factors, which may influence various observable indicator variables. Thus, by utilizing these models, future studies may include differing transnational activities, for example social ties, return visits, identities and alike, and investigate to what extent these are determined by a common latent predisposition (such as transnationalism). Therefore, latent structure modelling constitutes a promising set of techniques, which have not yet been utilized in research on transnationalism. Instead, most studies arbitrarily select a distinct transnational behavior and regress it on a set of predictor variables. However, as theoretically derived knowledge on the predictors of transnational activities is scarce, this approach is problematic. Cross-sectional regression analysis yields biased results when relevant predictor-variables are omitted. When omitted

variables correlate with the observed variables of a regression model – particularly with the dependent variable – unobserved heterogeneity poses a serious threat to the reliability of the obtained results. Hence, existing findings are not overwhelmingly trustworthy with regard to the inference of causal effects. In order to tackle this ambiguity, future research needs to engage in the identification of a coherent set of predictors of transnational behaviors. Furthermore, empirical studies need to make use of the advantages of longitudinal data analysis. In order to infer causal effects these are superior to cross-sectional methods which are still most commonly applied in the study of transnational activities (Guarnizo et al. 2003; Portes et al. 2002; Waldinger 2008).

Additionally, as regularity and persistence constitute the common ground of diverse transnational activities, future research could aim at these two characteristics for empirically assessing transnationalism. In this regard, however, studies would have to distinguish between bodily geographic and ideational activities. The term *ideational* refers to behaviors, which may be conducted without physically crossing borders, such as watching foreign television or communicating to residents of foreign countries via social media. Therefore, four types of activities may be distinguished, which future research needs to separately investigate. Table 1 displays the four types.

Table 1 Types of transnational activities

	Regular and persistent	Non-regular and/or non-persistent
Bodily geographic	Strict	Recreational
Ideational	Symbolic	Latent

In line with existing research, this presented typology applies a *strict* understanding of transnational activities, whenever an individual engages in activities which are conducted regularly and persistently in a bodily geographic manner across nation states. For example, an immigrant who regularly visits another country for business-related reasons represents the type of *strict* transnational activities. In another example, an Italian immigrant, who lives in Greece and regularly travels to Denmark in order to meet business clients, fits in this category as well. In contrast, *symbolic* transnational activities are restricted to the ideational level. However, individuals conduct *symbolic* actions regularly and persistently. As these actions can be conducted without crossing a border, they usually involve lower costs than *strict* transnational engagement. Identifying in a hybrid manner and with consumption of cultural commodities, such as arts and cuisine, which are directed towards mul-

multiple nation states belongs in this category. As such, a Dutch immigrant in Poland, who persistently identifies as Dutch-Polish and who regularly watches Dutch and Polish TV programs, engages in *symbolic* transnational activities. *Recreational* transnational engagement refers to bodily geographic activities, which individuals conduct either non-regularly or non-persistently or both. A Spanish immigrant who lives in France and who occasionally visits his family in the home country engages in a *recreational* transnational activity. The last type of activities refers to non-regular and/or non-persistent ideational behaviors. This type may be labeled as *latent* transnational activities. Individuals engaging in these kinds of behaviors conduct low-cost, cross-border activities. Among others, informing oneself about a specific event in the home country represents a *latent* transnational behavior. A Turkish immigrant living in Belgium who does not follow Turkish media, but keeps particularly informed about the Soma mine disaster in 2014, engages in a *latent* transnational activity. *Latent* transnational activities presuppose the lowest level of engagement. However, activities that belong to this category may constitute a starting point for other, more demanding types of conduct.

4 Conclusion

This contribution reviewed parts of the empirical literature on transnational activities. It did so with a specific focus on the measurement of transnationalism. Although it provided no exhaustive review, the contribution highlighted the great diversity of areas, phenomena, and variables, which are researched under the term transnational activities. According to the presented studies, this contribution subsequently distinguished two research strategies: a *focused* and a *comprehensive* strategy. As the majority of studies obey a focused approach, this contribution argued in favor of future engagement in comprehensive research projects. Particularly, the interrelations of different transnational areas constitute considerable blind spots. Thus, despite their obvious problems, *comprehensive* studies are needed in order to gain more holistic insights into transnational behaviors.

Furthermore, a typology of four kinds of transnational behaviors was proposed. Future research may utilize this typology and extend it. However, the corresponding studies need to specify how regularity and persistence of activities would be assessed. Following that, researchers need to identify the causal predictors of the distinct cross-border behaviors. These will most likely differ across the four presented types. The conceptual distinction between different types of activities helps disentangling confounding effects and variables. Particularly, it provides researchers with a heuristic technique to identify the specific kind of transnational behavior

one aims to study. However, the presented typology has the following limitations. First and foremost, the defining characteristics of regularity and persistence need further elaboration. No particular timing has been proposed that defines a regular or persistent activity. Specifically, the timing may differ according to the particular activity of interest. For example, traveling to another country once a year may constitute a regular schedule, while reading a foreign newspaper once a year may not. Accordingly, the presented types can only be distinguished as long as agreement on regularity and persistence is achieved. For example, a Russian immigrant in Finland who travels to Russia once in ten years may be classified as *recreational* transnational. However, how many visits are necessary for the exact same individual in order to engage in a *strict* transnational activity? Both one and five visits in ten years may represent a coherent answer to this question. Thus, the limits of every category and type need to be adjusted according to the specific research question. However, the presented typology may provide guidance in this process. Furthermore, future studies need to intensify efforts to establish a common inventory of cross-border activities referring to the different types of activities. Subsequently, the improved and unified measurements would contribute to cumulative research that may unify the existing scattered insights into transnational activities. A better understanding not only serves social sciences, but also informs political and societal stakeholders about what measures need to be taken to improve societal service and immigrants' integration. In this regard, the presented typology specifies at least four distinct target populations that need to be approached separately.

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