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Abstract

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht, auf welche Weise Mitglieder der Generation Z mit Migrationserfahrung den Begriff der Integration im Kontext der gegenwärtigen digitalen Gesellschaft verstehen und interpretieren sowie wie alltägliche Erfahrungen und digitale Umgebungen ihre Wahrnehmungen von Zugehörigkeit und sozialen Beziehungen beeinflussen. Ausgehend von theoretischen Ansätzen zu Integration, Zugehörigkeit, Othering-Prozessen und der digitalen Gesellschaft hinterfragt diese Arbeit kritisch die Annahme, dass Integration einen linearen und sequenziellen Prozess darstellt, der zwangsläufig zu einer Identifikation mit der Aufnahmegesellschaft führt. In epistemologischer Hinsicht verfolgt die Arbeit eine Verschiebung von dominanten strukturellen Ansätzen, die Integration durch formale Indikatoren und institutionelle Rahmenbedingungen betrachten, hin zu phänomenologischen und interpretativen Ansätzen, welche subjektive Bedeutungen, Alltagserfahrungen und individuelle Interpretationen sozialer Wirklichkeit hervorheben. Besonderes Augenmerk wird auf die Weise gelegt, in der digitale Umgebungen soziale Interaktionen und Prozesse der Bedeutungsproduktion unter Mitgliedern der Generation Z prägen, die häufig als die erste Generation der „digital natives“ beschrieben wird. Die Untersuchung basiert auf einem qualitativen Forschungsansatz und halbstrukturierten Interviews mit acht Personen mit Migrationserfahrung, die in Wien leben. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Befragten Integration nicht ausschließlich durch strukturelle Indikatoren verstehen, sondern auch durch subjektive Erfahrungen, die mit sozialer Anerkennung, emotionaler Sicherheit und alltäglicher Partizipation verbunden sind. Die Ergebnisse weisen außerdem darauf hin, dass digitale Technologien und soziale Netzwerke wie Instagram, TikTok und YouTube wichtige Räume darstellen, in denen die Befragten dominante Vorstellungen von Integration interpretieren und hinterfragen. Besonders zeigte sich, dass humorvolle, ironische und alltagsbezogene digitale Inhalte den Befragten ermöglichen, normative Muster von Integration kritisch zu reflektieren sowie ein differenzierteres Verständnis von Zugehörigkeitsgrenzen und gesellschaftlichen Prozessen zu entwickeln.

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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies

1 Introduction

The concept of integration holds a significant place in contemporary discourses on migration, yet it remains one of the most imprecise still widely used terms in academic literature. Although it is often assumed that all participants in the debate intuitively understand what integration means, a closer examination reveals that the term encompasses a range of different, and at times even contradictory, interpretations (Favell 2010). In public discourse, integration is typically described as the process of incorporating migrants into society, but it is not always clear what exactly this “incorporation” entails, how it is measured, or by what standards (Alba & Nee 2003). This raises the question of whether integration functions primarily as an analytical category, a political concept, or an everyday term used differently depending on the context.

Over the decades, the social sciences have developed various approaches to explaining integration. Some models emphasize institutional and structural aspects, such as inclusion¹ in the education system, language acquisition, labor market participation, or legal status regulation (Esser 2001; Penninx & Garcés-Mascreñas 2016). These approaches operate on the assumption that integration can be measured through formal indicators and that institutions are the key framework for social inclusion. In contrast, other scholars draw attention to everyday practices, feelings of belonging, emotional bonds, social networks, and identity processes, thereby challenging the exclusive reliance on structural measurements of integration (Schinkel 2018; Youkhana 2015). From this perspective, integration goes beyond institutional inclusion and encompasses subjective dimensions that influence how migrants feel within society and how they shape their everyday interactions.

Due to these theoretical differences, the question arises whether integration is a stable and universal concept or a fluid category shaped by social, political, cultural, and generational contexts. Research shows that the meaning of integration evolves over time and that different societies use the same term to pursue various goals, policies, and normative frameworks (Castles et al. 2014). Some authors stress that integration can only be understood when analyzed in relation to specific historical and social circumstances, which further complicates its theoretical framework (Schinkel 2018).

Drawing on the work of Marx and Engels, integration as term can be approached through the lens in a similar vein, Gramsci’s theoretical contributions point to the idea that social order may be sustained not only through material structures, but also through processes of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). Within this framework, integration can be considered as a process through which dominant ways of thinking, values, and norms are transmitted and reproduced, potentially

¹ Critical scholars argue that the concept of *inclusion* can reproduce normative expectations about “successful” participation without fully addressing structural inequalities and power relations (Schinkel, 2018).

becoming part of everyday practices and what is often understood as “common sense.” These processes may also be related to the shaping of “socially acceptable” forms of belonging, as well as to the drawing of boundaries between those recognized as “integrated” and those positioned as “others.”

In this sense, this master’s thesis aims to analyze the mechanisms that shape and sustain the concept of integration, with a particular focus on the processes of its social reproduction. In this regard, the study will examine the ways in which specific patterns are transmitted and internalized, as well as their impact on social relations and perceptions of belonging, particularly among members of Generation Z² with migration experience.

1.1 Problem statement

Generation Z is commonly defined as comprising individuals born in the mid-to-late 1990s, with its starting point frequently situated between 1995 and 1997 in the literature (Dorsey, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2019). Having grown up in an environment characterized by constant digital connectivity, widespread internet access, and social media use, this generation is often considered the first truly “digital native” generation (Pew Research Center, 2019)

In contrast to earlier generations, whose socialization processes were more closely linked to physical institutions and local communities such as family, school, and neighbourhood environments, Generation Z is increasingly socialized within so-called “networked publics” digital spaces that shape social interaction across both online and offline contexts (Boyd, 2014). In this regard, the growing relevance of digital environments raises the question of how such conditions influence the ways in which integration is experienced and understood.

From an analytical perspective, this issue can be approached through three interrelated dimensions: a generational dimension focusing on Generation Z, a technological dimension referring to digital environments, and a social dimension focusing on integration as both a term and a concept. Examining the intersection of these dimensions is particularly relevant in contemporary urban contexts characterized by diversity and social complexity. Vienna is frequently described in the literature as a dynamic urban setting with a long history of mobility and a high level of super-diversity (Kohlbacher et al., 2016). The city is characterized by a complex mix of backgrounds, age groups, socioeconomic positions, and languages. According to official data from the City of Vienna, over one-third of the population (36.4%) holds foreign citizenship, while 40.9% of residents were born outside Austria (Stadt Wien, 2025). Against this background, Vienna represents a particularly relevant context for examining how generational and technological conditions shape the experience

² Generation Z generally refers to people born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s and is considered the first generation to grow up with digital technologies and social media as an integral part of everyday life (Twenge, 2017)

and understanding of integration.

Although studies in Austria and Vienna have increasingly explored migrants' everyday use of digital technologies, existing research has predominantly focused on the practical and functional aspects of technology use, such as communication, access to information, and maintaining transnational connections (Alinejad, 2020; Leurs & Smets, 2018). Less attention has been given to how these digital conditions may influence the ways integration is perceived and experienced among members of Generation Z. This indicates a need for further research on the relationship between generational position, digital environments, and perception of integration. Building on this, the aim of this master thesis is to critically re-examine classical theoretical approaches to integration, with a specific emphasis on the widely cited model that conceptualizes integration as consisting of four interrelated dimensions: cultural (acculturation), structural (access to education, employment, legal status), social (interactions and networks), and identificational (a sense of belonging and identification with the host society) (Esser 2001; Esser 2004). This framework, commonly associated with structural- functionalist approaches to migration studies in the early 2000s, suggests that integration unfolds in a sequential manner beginning with cultural adaptation, followed by structural inclusion, leading to social participation and ultimately to the development of identification with the host country (Heckmann & Schnapper 2003; Esser 2004). While Esser (2001) conceptualizes identificational integration as the final stage of a sequential integration process, more recent approaches have emphasized the concept of belonging as a dynamic and non-linear phenomenon that may emerge independently of structural integration (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In this sense, belonging is not an outcome of integration but also a subjective and relational process shaped by everyday experiences and social interactions. This thesis explores the relevance of this sequential logic in the context of digital society, particularly among Generation Z individuals with migration experiences living in Vienna. By analyzing their subjective experiences, the study seeks to examine whether a sense of belonging and identification can emerge even in situations where certain structural indicators of integration, such as stable employment, educational attainment, or legal security, have not yet been achieved. On the other hand, the study explores which processes of othering (Yuval-Davis 2011) are present in everyday contexts, and how, and to what extent, these processes are reproduced or transformed within online environments.

Based on this framework, the central research question of master thesis is:

How do members of Generation Z as everyday users of digital technologies, shape their perceptions and understandings of integration?

To address the research question, this study focuses on how experiences of belonging and othering are articulated in both everyday and digital contexts. In doing so, the analysis examines how different dimensions are perceived, interpreted, and negotiated in relation to both online and offline social realities. Furthermore, the research investigates whether and in what ways political and

public discourses surrounding integration, which often emphasize structural indicators such as employment, education, language acquisition, and legal status (Esser, 2001), are reflected, reproduced, or contested in digital environments, and how these relate to participants' own understandings and experiences.

In this context, the thesis also explores how and to what extent processes of othering emerge in digital environments and how they relate to experiences of belonging in everyday life. By examining these dynamics, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how the term integration is interpreted and negotiated across different contexts.

2 Theory

This chapter gives a theoretical panorama of the evolution of the idea of integration in the social sciences, from the classical formulation of sociological thought at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries to more contemporary debates, in which there is an increasing focus of the analysis of integration around the idea of belonging. It begins with the structural-functional approaches to integration as a process of individual inclusion in an existing social structure mediated by values, institutions, and the functional needs of the system (Durkheim, 1893; Parsons, 1951), and with the models of assimilation in the earlier sociology of migration (Park & Burgess, 1921, 1925; Gordon, 1964).

The next generation of models, which view integration as a multidimensional phenomenon, remains largely entrenched in the structuralist paradigm. These would include Essers's theoretical approach (2001), as well as those which view integration in terms of resource access, positioning, or social networking approaches (Alba & Nee 2003, Portes & Rumbaut 2001, Ager & Strang 2004, 2010). Even those approaches that critique the assumptions of earlier assimilation theories include, in terms of their conceptions and approaches, a continuing social structure, system, or framework in which the integration must take place. By similar token, the more transnational approaches, in spite of their critiques of more nationally bounded or linear approaches to integration (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, Faist 2000, Vertovec 2009), continue to work, at least in part, within the structuralist paradigm, in approaches that examine social space, networks, or contexts that are relatively stable.

Based on this, the latter part of this chapter presents an examination of phenomenological and critical approaches to the study of integration that challenge the very notion of integration itself as a concept, instead beginning to focus on the subjective experiences and practices of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011; Anthias, 2008; Antonsich, 2010; Youkhana, 2015). It is out of this focus that a perspective on modern experiences of migration can now begin to develop, including an analysis of digital technologies in this context.

2.1 Structural–Functionalist Perspective on Integration

The concern with the concept of integration in the social sciences emerged toward the end of the 19th century. The development of disciplines like sociology was, in many ways, a response to the need to understand how social cohesion could be maintained amid the growing differentiation and fragmentation brought on by modernization (Nisbet, 1967). In this context questions arose about the stability of the social order and the mechanisms that connect individuals into a functioning whole.

A central figure in this theoretical tradition is Émile Durkheim, one of the founding thinkers of sociology and a forerunner of the structural-functionalist perspective. Durkheim saw social facts as objective, external, and binding forces that shape individual behavior (Durkheim, 2013/ 1895). His distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity (Durkheim, 2013/1893) offers an early systematic framework for understanding how social cohesion transforms as societies move from traditional to modern, more complex forms (Giddens, 1978).

Durkheim's exploration of anomie in *Le Suicide* (1897) further develops this view by showing how social order can unravel when normative regulation weakens. As Lukes (1972) emphasizes, Durkheim demonstrates that social integration is not just about social connectedness, but also deeply tied to shared norms and moral frameworks. This insight had a strong influence on later functionalist theories especially Parsons (1951), who defined integration through the role of normative systems in sustaining social order, and Merton's structural theory (1938), where anomie is described as a gap between culturally approved goals and the available means for achieving them. This framing emphasizes the importance of structural conditions in shaping social inclusion. These ideas also resonate in more contemporary theories, such as Esser's model (2001), which defines integration as a multidimensional process rooted in the functional demands of the social system offering a more formalized version of the structural-functionalist interpretation of integration.

2.2 Assimilation-Based Models of Integration

Classical structuralist sociological theories laid the groundwork for understanding key elements of social order such as social cohesion, normative regulation, and institutional inclusion (Durkheim, 1893; Parsons, 1951; Merton, 1938). In the early 20th century, assimilation was central to most discussions about how individuals and groups integrate into new social environments. One of the first systematic articulations of this concept came from the Chicago School of Sociology, especially through the work of Park & Burgess in their foundational text *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921), they described assimilation as “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups

and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (Park & Burgess, 1921: 735). Park and Burgess expanded on this framework in *The City* (1925), where the city is portrayed as a powerful agent of socialization for migrants, shaping their experiences in line with dominant social norms. According to Park & Burgess (1925) interpretation, this transformation was a result of the city’s institutional structures such as schools, churches, factories, and mass media which played a key role in guiding migrants’ behavior and expectations (Park & Burgess 1925: 3). From this perspective, the city was not merely a physical space but a complex social environment that directed individuals toward assimilation into the prevailing culture. Integration, in this model, was seen as a largely one-directional process, where migrants were expected to abandon their previous ways of life and adopt the cultural norms of the majority (Park & Burgess, 1925). The assimilationist model of the Chicago School became a core reference point for early sociological thinking on migration and urban integration, and its influence can still be seen in certain contemporary debates (Schinkel, 2018). While their approach emphasized shared experience and cultural blending, it did not clearly distinguish between cultural and structural integration something later scholars sought to clarify, notably Milton M. Gordon. In his work *Assimilation in American Life* (1964), Gordon proposed a more nuanced model, made up of several interconnected but distinct stages (Gordon, 1964: 61). He differentiated between acculturation the adoption of cultural practices such as language, clothing, and values and structural assimilation, which referred to the inclusion of minority groups into mainstream social networks and institutions (Gordon, 1964: 62). Gordon identified seven dimensions of assimilation: cultural (acculturation), structural (access to dominant networks), marital (intermarriage), identificational (a sense of belonging), the absence of prejudice, the absence of discrimination, and civic assimilation (resolution of value and power conflicts) (Gordon, 1964: 70). Importantly, Gordon stressed that adopting the language and customs of the majority does not automatically result in social inclusion. As the author pointed out, “Individuals and groups may ‘acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of others,’ yet still be excluded from ‘sharing their experience,’ remaining indefinitely delayed in the process of being ‘incorporated in a common cultural life’” (Gordon, 1964: 67). In other words, migrants may be highly acculturated but still socially excluded a condition Gordon identified as persistent within the American context (Gordon, 1964: 68)

In classical sociological thought, integration was often equated with assimilation, a process in which migrants were expected to conform to the cultural norms of the majority society. The Chicago School helped define this understanding, while Gordon’s (1964) work later revealed that cultural adaptation does not necessarily lead to structural inclusion.

2.3 Integration as Systemic Adaptation: Parsons' Perspective

While Durkheim (1893) and the early assimilation theories of the Chicago School (Park & Burgess, 1921; 1925) emphasized integration as a process of creating a shared cultural and moral matrix, Parsons further develops this classical understanding by conceptualizing integration, in his view, as a dynamic process of maintaining social order through socialization and the internalization of values (Parsons, 1951). His theoretical contribution enables a shift from a one-sided understanding of adaptation toward an analysis of the complex mechanisms through which, according to Parsons, individuals are incorporated into the social system (Parsons, 1951). For this reason, Parsons represents a key link between early concepts of assimilation and later structuralist understandings of integration. In his book *The Social System* (1951), Parsons emphasizes that the problem of integration, in his view, is not whether it occurs, but how it is accomplished: "the problem of integration is not whether it happens, but how it is accomplished" (Parsons 1951: 202). Parsons conceives society as a system of action, in which the maintenance of order, within his theoretical framework, depends on the interrelation of individual actors, coordinated through socialization and mechanisms of social control. Integration, according to Parsons (1951), is the process through which individuals become incorporated into a network of interdependent social roles, values, and normative demands. In his understanding, it is not merely the existence of social order, but a continuous process of adaptation, in which both individuals and groups respond to the structural requirements of the social system. Socialization, according to Parsons, is the process through which personality is shaped to participate effectively within the social system (Parsons 1951: 208). Nevertheless, Parsons (1951) argues that, within his theoretical framework, successful integration is not achieved through mechanical conformity. Behavior must be motivationally consistent with the value system, rather than merely formally correct (Parsons 1951: 211). In other words, individuals, according to Parsons, must internalize norms and experience them as meaningful and legitimate at the individual level. In this sense, within Parsons' theory, integration involves more than mere adaptation (Parsons 1951). Individuals may formally comply with societal requirements, such as learning the language or participating in the labor market, yet remain socially marginal if, in terms of Parsons' argument, they have not developed a cognitive and affective identification with the normative framework of the society in which they live. The Author makes this clear by arguing that functional integration depends on whether individuals regard social norms as their own: "functional integration of the individual into society depends on whether they regard social norms as their own" (Parsons 1951: 230).

2.4 Later Structural Approaches to Migrant Integration

In literature, various models have been developed that conceptualize integration as a multidimensional process involving access to resources, institutional opportunities, social recognition, and patterns of participation in key areas of social life. This perspective is consistent with the broader structuralist approach to integration (Esser 2001; Alba & Nee 2003; Portes & Rumbaut 2001). Although these models differ from earlier theoretical approaches that primarily equated integration with assimilation, they largely remain within the structuralist tradition, expanding rather than rejecting it particularly in how they link access to resources with processes of social positioning. This means that access to resources such as employment, education, and housing is not equally distributed, but is closely linked to individuals' social position within the host society, including factors such as legal status, class, and levels of social recognition (Portes & Rumbaut 2001: 45).

The focus continues to be on social structures, institutional mechanisms, and the distribution of opportunities, but now includes symbolic recognition and processes of positioning within various social fields (Alba & Nee 2003: 9). As Esser (2001) points out, social integration comprises four interconnected dimensions: acculturation, placement, interaction, and identification. According to him, it is the combination of cultural competence and advantageous social positioning that forms the basis for meaningful and lasting participation in society (Esser 2001: 16).

These dimensions are not just parallel aspects of integration they follow a clear causal order. Cultural and structural integration are seen by Esser (2001) as prerequisites for social integration, while emotional identification with the host society tends to emerge only at a later stage, once individuals begin to experience concrete benefits and a sense of recognition in their new environment (Esser 2001: 23). From this point of view, integration is not a simple, linear process. Rather, it is a dynamic and interdependent one in which access to resources, the ability to occupy social positions, and the formation of social relationships continually influence one another. These interactions shape both the degree of participation and the sense of belonging migrants can achieve. Within this framework, Esser's position becomes clear: social integration in the host society is essentially unattainable without some level of *Angleichung* that is, a process he equates with assimilation (Esser 2001). The distinction between "integration" and "assimilation," then, appears to be more a matter of terminology than a substantive difference (Esser 2001: 23).

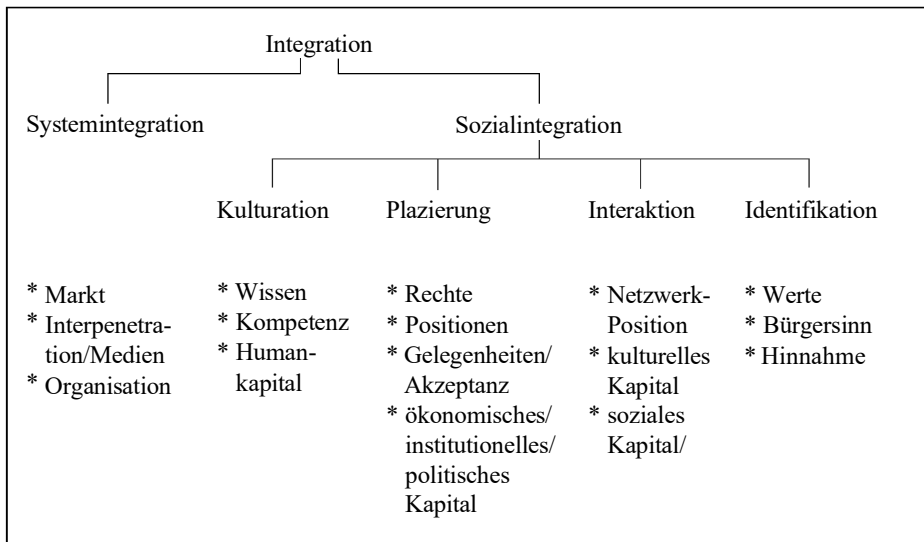


Figure 1: Systemintegration und die vier Dimensionen der Sozialintegration Esser (2001:16)

Esser draws a clear distinction between systemic integration referring to the functional cohesion of society as a whole and the social integration of migrants, emphasizing that these dimensions are not necessarily logically connected (Esser 2001: 31). While one could theoretically imagine a society that is systemically integrated without assimilated migrants, Esser argues that such a scenario rarely holds up in practice. When ethnic differentiation is combined with a lack of deep social integration, it often leads to interethnic tensions and conflict (Esser 2001: 32). For this reason, he claims that the idea of enduring multicultural harmony understood as the equal and stable coexistence of diverse ethnic groups within a shared society is “nothing more than a beautiful dream.” In empirical terms, he suggests, all societies that remain ethnically divided over time tend to develop systems of ethnic stratification, where groups are arranged hierarchically (Esser 2001: 36).

In this view, according to Esser (2001) without structural assimilation at least in areas such as access to education, employment, resources, and political participation ethnic differences are likely to turn into ethnic inequalities, ultimately undermining the sustainability of social cohesion. So, although systemic and social integration can be distinguished conceptually, maintaining this separation in the long term is rarely viable. Systemic integration may ensure a society’s basic functioning, but only social integration understood as a process involving cultural, structural, social, and identificational assimilation can reduce ethnic stratification and enable stable interethnic relations. (Esser 2001)

This extended structuralist view of integration also helps situate the contribution of Ager and Strang (2004;2010). Although their model was developed in a policy context, it remains grounded in the structural logic of institutional positioning (Ager & Strang 2004a; Ager & Strang 2010). Their framework identifies several core domains “rights and citizenship,” “language and cultural knowledge,” “safety and stability,” “markers and means,” and “social connections” which together

shape the degree of social inclusion (Ager & Strang 2010: 589).

In their model, structure remains central: legal systems, institutional arrangements, and patterns of resource distribution define the conditions under which integration can take place (Ager & Strang 2010: 592). Ager and Strang stress that “rights and citizenship” are the fundamental prerequisites for any form of belonging (Ager & Strang 2010: 592), since the way a state defines national membership directly influences whether refugees and migrants are recognized as individuals who belong (Ager & Strang 2010: 593). In doing so, their model implicitly affirms Esser’s hierarchy of integration dimensions, where cultural and structural inclusion precede social and emotional identification (Esser 2001: 23). However, they also shift the idea of *belonging* from a final outcome to an initial structural condition arguing that it is shaped from the outset by legal status, rights, and public discourse (Ager & Strang 2010: 592–593). Furthermore, consistent with structuralist thinking, their model assumes that integration outcomes depend on how resources are distributed through networks of social capital (Ager & Strang 2010: 595).

In discussing structuralist interpretations of integration, it’s also useful to compare Esser’s (2001) theoretical position with the reformulations offered by Alba and Nee in *Remaking the American Mainstream* (2003). While Esser (2001) maintains that stable interethnic relations require some level of cultural and structural assimilation to prevent long-term ethnic hierarchies, Alba and Nee (Alba & Nee 2003) approach the issue from a different angle. Drawing on and reinterpreting the Chicago School tradition, they argue that the American mainstream historically emerged as “a composite culture evolving out of the interpenetration of diverse cultural practices and beliefs” (Alba & Nee 2003: 9). With this, they reject the idea of a fixed, culturally homogenous mainstream. Unlike Esser (2001), who sees cultural convergence as necessary for reducing ethnic stratification, Alba and Nee (2003) propose that assimilation need not follow a single dominant model. Instead, the mainstream itself is continually evolving and becoming more inclusive.

This broadened structuralist framework also contextualizes the work of Portes and Rumbaut in their book *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (2001). While their model, like Esser’s (2001), focuses on integration as positioning within key societal fields, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) introduce a significant revision. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) argue that assimilation is not a linear process, as second-generation immigrants may follow different pathways, including upward mobility, selective acculturation.

By emphasizing how access to institutions, racialized structures, and local contexts can produce divergent outcomes, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) expand the structuralist perspective. Their work highlights possibilities that Esser’s (2001) more linear model does not fully anticipate.

Taken together, the contributions of Esser (2001), Alba and Nee (2003), and Portes and Rumbaut (2001) all build on and revise the structuralist tradition of thinking about migrant integration. Like earlier thinkers such as Park and Burgess (1921), Gordon (1964), Parsons (1951), and Bourdieu (1986), they view integration not as a purely subjective process but as one grounded in the

distribution of positions within key social structures such as education, the labor market, and political institutions. In this respect, they all share with classical assimilation theory the assumption that social cohesion and stability depend on migrants' ability to access and participate in the institutional core of society.

2.5 Post-Structuralist and Transnational Approaches to Integration

The next part of the chapter introduces poststructuralist and transnational approaches as a response to the limitations of nationally bounded and linear models of integration. While structuralist theories tend to conceptualize integration as a process of incorporation into a relatively stable and unified social order, poststructuralist perspectives challenge this assumption by emphasizing the dynamic and socially constructed nature of identities. In this view, identities, affiliations, and social practices are not fixed, but are shaped across multiple social fields and locations, and are embedded in changing historical and socio-political contexts (Hall, 1990; Bourdieu, 1977; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

A central insight of these approaches is that identity should not be understood as an individual or pre-given attribute, but as a socially mediated and ongoing process of negotiation between past experiences and present social conditions. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (1977) highlights how internalized dispositions are formed through social structures and, in turn, shape perception, behavior, and practices of belonging. Similarly, Hall's distinction between identity as "being" and "becoming" (1990) underscores that identity is both rooted in shared histories and continuously rearticulated through processes of cultural transformation. From this perspective, migration is not simply a movement between places, but a context in which identities are constantly reconfigured.

These poststructuralist views on identity and subjectivity are complemented by transnational perspectives from authors such as Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (1992), Vertovec (2009), Faist (2000), and Bauböck (2010). They demonstrate that contemporary migration takes place across overlapping social, economic, and political spaces that go beyond national borders. From a transnational perspective, migration is not seen as a break from the country of origin, but as an ongoing connection between multiple places. Within this space, identities, social ties, and feelings of belonging are formed simultaneously in both the country of origin and the country of residence. Integration, therefore, is not viewed as a one-way process of "joining one society," but as a complex, layered dynamic in which belonging, mobility, and cultural orientation are distributed across transnational fields of interaction.

2.5.1 Bourdieu: Habitus and Language as Symbolic Power

Unlike Parsons (1951) structuralist view that tends to see individuals as shaped in a fairly fixed and predictable way by society, Bourdieu (1977) offers a more dynamic and agency-oriented perspective that highlights how people actively shape and transform social structures through their actions. While Parsons focused on social behavior as mostly driven by internalized social norms (Parsons, 1951), Bourdieu rethinks this by connecting structure and agency into one flexible framework (Wacquant, 2007). In his work *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), Bourdieu introduces the concept of habitus, which he defines as a system of lasting, adaptable dispositions that guide how people perceive, act, and respond to the world. Later scholars describe habitus as something that is deeply rooted in the body and shaped by a person's life experiences and social background (Wacquant, 2014; Reay, 2004). These patterns are not conscious that they learned through life and influence behavior across different social settings. Habitus helps people carry parts of their past while also adapting to change, which explains why migrants' previous experiences become part of how they adjust in the present (Grenfell, 2014). Bourdieu calls habitus a kind of personal law rooted in early upbringing, and even when someone enters a new context like through migration they often carry with them ways of thinking and behaving shaped by their origin. This can lead to what researchers call "habitus stretch" (Ingram & Abrahams, 2016), where someone from one social background is forced to adapt, stretch, and even transform their internal habits in a very different environment. These internalized ways of acting or dispositions also create what Bourdieu calls *doxa*, which are the unspoken beliefs and assumptions that make the social world feel natural or unquestionable (Bourdieu, 1977).

Integration, when viewed through the lens of Bourdieu's theory (1977), is not merely a process of adopting new behaviors, but rather involves an internal transformation, understood as a reorganization of the self that incorporates both prior and newly acquired experiences. This process can lead to the development of a "hybrid habitus", one that mixes elements from the migrant's origin and the host society, offering a strong critique of simplistic, linear, or assimilationist models of integration (Reay, 2004). Bourdieu's theory suggests that integration can be understood as a deep, often unconscious process of personal transformation (Bourdieu, 1977). By emphasizing the relationship between habitus and doxa, this theoretical framework offers a way to interpret how social structures may be both reproduced and transformed through everyday practices.

Alongside the concepts of habitus and doxa, Bourdieu also developed the concept of linguistic capital, which is particularly elaborated in *Language and Symbolic Power* (Bourdieu, 1991). According to Bourdieu (1991), language does not function merely as a neutral instrument of communication, but also as a form of symbolic power connected to broader relations of inequality and social hierarchy. The value and legitimacy of particular linguistic forms depend on the social

context in which they are used and on the power relations that shape which ways of speaking are socially recognized as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1991). In this sense, language proficiency can influence access to education, employment, and broader forms of social participation (Bourdieu, 1991).

2.5.2 Identity as a Social Construct: Tajfel, Turner, and Hall on Integration

Building on poststructuralist ideas that see identity as a constantly evolving process shaped by experience, particularly through Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a system of lasting and transferable dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977), approaches to integration have increasingly focused on how migrants experience belonging and how they position themselves within different social fields. In this context, the works of Tajfel and Turner (1986) and Hall (1990) are offering different but complementary perspectives on how identity forms in migration. According to Social Identity Theory, Tajfel and Turner define social identity as the part of an individual's self-concept that comes from the social groups they believe they belong to (Tajfel & Turner, 1986: 16). A key idea in their theory is that people seek to maintain a positive self-image by favoring their own group over others (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and even the simple awareness of being part of a different group is enough to trigger in-group bias and subtle forms of discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1986: 13). These symbolic boundaries can shape everyday social interactions and affect how accepted individuals feel in a new society. This perspective adds to Bourdieu's (1977) understanding of habitus, showing that the individual experience isn't only shaped by internal, historically rooted dispositions, but also by external social labels and expectations. Hall, in his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990), adds a poststructuralist layer to this discussion by distinguishing between two ways of thinking about cultural identity: one that is based on shared history and heritage, and another that sees identity as something in progress as much about "becoming" as it is about "being" (Hall, 1990: 225). Author argues that identity belongs to both the future and the past, and that it's not a fixed thing that exists outside of history or culture, but something continuously reshaped by memory, encounters, and cultural shifts especially relevant in the experience of migration. Taken together, these theories show that identities can't be reduced to a single explanation. On one hand, there are external forces like social categories and symbolic boundaries that shape how for example individuals are seen and treated (Tajfel & Turner, 1986); on the other hand, identity is also a deeply personal and historical process of negotiation, where individuals try to reconcile their cultural roots with the realities of living in a new environment (Hall, 1990).

2.5.3 Transnational perspective on integration

A transnational perspective on integration, as developed by scholars such as Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (1992) and further elaborated by Vertovec (2009), has reshaped how identity, belonging, and migration are understood by moving beyond the confines of the nation state. It emphasizes crossborder practices, multiple attachments, and the simultaneity of social relations across different contexts. However, despite its critique of methodological nationalism, transnationalism does not fully escape the structural relevance of the nation-state. Rather, it often remains implicitly anchored in it, as national frameworks continue to shape the conditions under which transnational practices unfold.

Within this perspective, identity can be understood as a complex and multi-layered process shaped by internal dispositions, group-based categorizations, and historically situated narratives. In this regard, insights from Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a "system of durable, transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1977: 82), Tajfel and Turner's understanding of identity as structured through social categorizations and symbolic boundaries (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and Hall's view of identity as a continuous process of "being and becoming" (Hall, 1990: 225) remain highly relevant. However, these approaches have traditionally been conceptualized within the framework of the nation-state, which transnationalism seeks to move beyond.

Scholars such as Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (1992) argue that the term "immigrant" is misleading, as it assumes a complete break from the country of origin, an assumption that does not reflect the realities of contemporary migration. Migrants often maintain ongoing social, political, and economic ties to multiple places, developing dual or multiple forms of belonging (1992: 1). Similarly, Vertovec (2009) conceptualizes transnationalism as a network of cross-border relationships and interactions, raising the crucial question: "integration into what?" (2009: 25), thereby challenging the assumption that integration implies alignment with a single culture or state. From a broader social science perspective, Donnan and Wilson (1999) argue that borders can no longer be understood as fixed frames for identity, while Basch (1994) introduces the notion of the "deterritorialization of nations," pointing to the erosion of traditional links between identity and territory in a globalized world. Faist (2000) further develops the concept of transnational social spaces, emphasizing how family, economic, and political connections shape integration across both countries of origin and settlement. Hannerz (1996) contributes by suggesting that identity is not tied to a single place but emerges through interactions within a "global cultural mosaic." Similarly, Appadurai (1996), through the concept of "ethnoscapes," highlights how global flows of people, images, and media shape how individuals imagine and experience belonging (1996: 35). In this context, as Jakubowicz (2011) and Canan (2015) argue, traditional models of integration, based on permanent settlement and orientation toward the host society, no longer adequately

capture contemporary realities. Instead, transnational perspectives emphasize hybridity, multiple identities, and simultaneous participation in diverse social and cultural spaces. At the same time, the continued relevance of national institutions and borders suggests that transnationalism should be understood not as a complete break from the nation-state, but as a reconfiguration of its role in shaping integration process. On the other hand, recent critiques have highlighted important limitations of this perspective, pointing to its conceptual overstretching and the risk of losing analytical precision (de Jong and Dannecker, 2018; Pries, 2008). It has been argued that the increasing breadth of the concept has not been accompanied by sufficient theoretical development, resulting in a certain stagnation within the field (de Jong and Dannecker, 2018). Furthermore, transnational approaches have been criticized for insufficiently addressing inequalities, power relations, and the instability of social formations across contexts (de Jong and Dannecker, 2018).

2.6 From Integration to Belonging: A Phenomenological Rethinking

Phenomenological approaches mark a key epistemological shift from structuralist models of integration by pointing to the limitations of understanding social processes solely through fixed systems, norms, and functions. The tradition that began with Durkheim (1893/1984), further developed by Parsons (1951), and later refined in integration theories like those of Esser (2001, 2006), based on the assumption that society functions as a unified and coherent whole, maintained by the functional incorporation of individuals into existing institutions. In Esser's (2001, 2006) works in particular, this logic becomes even more defined: integration is seen as a step-by-step process in which individuals acquire specific resources and competencies such as language skills, education, access to the labor market, and social networks while identification with the majority society comes only at the end, as proof of successful adaptation. Within this model, migrants are largely seen as carriers of skills, deficits, or resources, while their everyday experiences of confusion, emotion, embodiment, interaction, and ongoing negotiation are treated as secondary or irrelevant. This leads to a view of integration as a technical process that can be measured, rather than as a fluid, relational experience in which people constantly negotiate their place, relationships, and sense of belonging.

Phenomenology offers a response to this by centering the subjective world of individuals their meanings, embodied experiences, and situated practices. Husserl (1936) emphasized that all social meaning is formed in the "lifeworld," the pre-theoretical background of everyday experience. Heidegger (1927) deepened this view by understanding subjectivity as "being in the world," showing that people don't experience society from a detached position, but through movement, concerns, emotions, and their spatial positioning. Merleau-Ponty (1945) introduced the body as the central medium of social experience, which, in the context of migration, means that space, bodily rhythms, and affective orientations are crucial for understanding integration. These philosophical foundations

were developed sociologically by Schutz (1932), who showed that social order is maintained through typification's, interpretations, and mutual expectations. Berger and Luckmann (1966) added that the "reality of society" is built through routines and everyday interactions, while Garfinkel (1967) revealed how social order depends on the unspoken rules and methods people use to make the world understandable. Goffman (1959, 1963), though not a phenomenologist in the strict sense, showed how inclusion and exclusion are performed through micro-interactions, stigma, and public displays of identity insights that are especially relevant for understanding the daily realities of migrants.

This shift toward subjectivity enabled the development of contemporary theories of belonging, which further expand the phenomenological perspective. Yuval-Davis (2006, 2011) argues that belonging is not a fixed state, but a process shaped by emotions, identifications, and political struggles over who is allowed to define the boundaries of community. Anthias (2008) suggests shifting the analytical focus toward the relational and situated positions of individuals, emphasizing that belonging cannot be reduced to institutional outcomes, but rather emerges from everyday interactions and power relations. Antonsich (2010) draws a distinction between the personal feeling of "being at home" and the politics of belonging, underlining how emotional safety and social recognition are deeply intertwined. Youkhana (2015) expands this view by emphasizing the socio-material dimensions of belonging rooted in embodied practices, routine movements, and the experience of urban space while Ahmed (2006) shows how feelings of belonging and "otherness" are produced through emotional orientations, highlighting the phenomenological nature of affect. Building on this, Ingold (2000) explores how movement, pathways, and what he calls "taskscape" help explain how migrants slowly embed themselves into new urban environments through bodily and spatial rhythms.

From an epistemological standpoint, phenomenology allows us to shift from viewing integration as a structured, institutional process to understanding it as an everyday, emotional, embodied, and relational experience. This shift creates space for theories of belonging, which are further explored in the next chapter approaches that view belonging as something grounded in subjectivity, affective ties, daily practices, and ongoing struggles over the boundaries of community.

2.6.1 Integration from a Critical Theory Perspective

Critiques from various scholars suggest that the concept of integration is not only politically and normatively charged, but also limited in terms of its basic assumptions. It is built on the idea of a homogeneous society, clearly defined community boundaries, and a linear path toward inclusion making it inadequate for understanding the complexities of contemporary migration experiences (Wieviorka 2013; Castro Varela 2013).

Critical perspectives on integration processes highlight that the very notion of "integration" often

creates specific ways of categorizing and perceiving migrants. As Varela (2013) points out, some dominant understandings of integration start by drawing a clear distinction between the so-called “normal” population and those labeled as having a migration background. For example, the term *Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund* (people with a migration background) is not merely descriptive. Instead, it signals a status of non-belonging and positions a large group of people in a category of “target groups” in need of specific, integration-oriented support (Varela 2013:15). In this way, such categorization becomes a tool for maintaining the idea that belonging to the majority community is something that must be “earned” through continuous integration efforts.

Similarly, integration policies reflect what Varela (2013) describes as a “logic of qualitative disposition,” in which migrants are divided into the “good” and the “bad.” Within this economically driven framework, “good” migrants are those who contribute to the welfare of society, while “bad” migrants are those who rely on or need social benefits and are therefore perceived as a burden (Varela 2013:25). This logic clearly shows that integration often operates as a system of evaluation and judgment, rather than as a neutral or inclusive process. Varela (2013) emphasizes that fundamental democratic values are difficult to reconcile with the way integration is currently used in political and public discourse. As she writes: “Democracy means that all people have the right to decide for themselves and together how they want to live. The language of integration is an enemy of democracy” (Varela 2013: 47). This position opens up space to rethink integration not just as an administrative or social process, but as a political instrument one that can actually limit equal participation in society.

In this critical framework, Schinkel’s work (2013, 2017) is particularly relevant. He argues that integration functions as an “empty signifier” a term whose meaning is constantly redefined through shifting moral expectations about what counts as legitimate belonging in society (Schinkel 2013: 1143). Integration regimes, he claims, do not merely assess levels of inclusion; rather, they reinforce an ideal of a “normal” society, where migrants are cast as those who must strive to meet that ideal. Schinkel shows that through integration tests, courses, and bureaucratic procedures, the state positions itself as the gatekeeper of belonging. It sets the criteria skills, norms, or values that determine who can enter the imagined core of society (Schinkel 2013: 1144).

This process is not neutral or purely descriptive, it actively produces a cultural distinction between “us” and “them,” constructing migrants as deviating from dominant norms whether in terms of language, work ethic, secularism, or so-called “values” (Schinkel 2013: 1146). In this way, integration becomes a mechanism that institutionally defines the boundaries of the community: it marks who is considered a full member of society, and who remains in a position of temporary, conditional, or incomplete belonging. As Schinkel concludes, this mechanism doesn’t just reflect social boundaries, it creates them, reinforcing a symbolic division between “society” and those seen as its external others (Schinkel 2013: 1154).

Following his broader genealogical analysis, Schinkel shows how integration emerges as a

coordinating concept that links the imagined whole of “society” to its supposed “parts.” It relies on a deeply rooted organicist idea of society as a living body (Schinkel 2017). Within this view, society is imagined as a homogeneous and healthy organism, threatened by the “pathology” of those who are not sufficiently integrated. Integration policies and measurements thus take on the role of a kind of “diagnosis” and “therapy” for the social order (Schinkel 2017: 38). As a result, integration is not simply a technical process of inclusion it operates as a normative regime that simultaneously produces and naturalizes the boundary between what is imagined as the coherent social “inside” and the problematized “outside.”

Further critiques of the concept of integration come from scholars within the broader sociological tradition. Wieviorka (2013) argues that for a long time, the idea of integration in sociology relied heavily on classical models built around the notions of homogeneous societies and strong social cohesion. This way of thinking, rooted in the frameworks of Durkheim (1893/1984) and Parsons (1951) assumes that the main goal of any society is to maintain unity, and individuals are seen primarily as needing to be “included” into an already existing system (Wieviorka 2013: 635). According to Wieviorka (2013), this approach overlooks individual perspectives, subjective experiences, and the profound changes brought about by globalization and contemporary migration. For this reason, she believes the concept of integration is too tied to an outdated sociological imagination and increasingly inadequate for understanding today’s transnationally connected societies. (Wieviorka 2013)

In other words, holistic principles and grand sociological theories, as seen in traditions like structuralism and functionalism, are no longer capable of explaining the complexity of integration. Even classical statistical analyses that focus on individual outcomes fail to capture the layered and evolving interactions that shape integration as a multi-dimensional and emergent social process (Kalter 2023). These critiques suggest it’s time to move away from the old paradigm of integration as a one-way path to inclusion and instead embrace approaches that acknowledge that social inclusion cannot be reduced to individual “success” metrics or formal participation.

Favell (1998, 2001) follows a similar line of thought. He argues that integration exists primarily as a policy construct, not as an empirically grounded social process. As he explains, the concept of integration was created within national administrative systems, and academic scholarship has too often adopted these categories uncritically rather than questioning or analyzing them (Favell 2001). This has led to the reproduction of the same assumptions about homogeneous national communities that political models of integration are built upon.

In migration studies, the concept of “othering” refers to institutional and discursive practices that create a clear division between “us” and “them” (Schinkel 2018; Anderson 2013). Anderson points out that this divide is historically constructed “the relationship between the kingdom and the forest,” as she puts it, has never been neutral but is “historically entangled and conditioned” (Anderson 2013: 178). The liberal narrative of migration as an individual choice hides the structural dependencies

behind it after all, “the wealth of the kingdom is not independent from the poverty of the woodcutter” (Anderson 2013: 180).

Within the concept of a “community of value,” the state is presented as a group of “good citizens” who share common moral and cultural values (Anderson 2013: 23). In contrast, figures such as the “non-citizen” and the “failed citizen” are used to define both external and internal “others” (Anderson 2013: 4, 179). These categories are not just descriptive they’re deeply normative and negatively marked (Anderson 2013: 3), reinforcing Tajfel and Turner’s argument that group identity is maintained through differentiation from those who are seen as failing to meet the norms of belonging (Tajfel & Turner 1986). This structural perspective on othering is further supported by Akbulut and Razum (2022), who stress that othering is not just about personal prejudice it is a discursive practice that creates hierarchies of belonging and material inequality (Akbulut & Razum 2022: 2). They also note that othering happens on multiple levels individual, institutional, and contextual and is upheld by long-standing power relations (Akbulut & Razum 2022: 3). This strengthens Anderson’s (2013) point about how migration regimes intersect with internal lines of social differentiation. National belonging is further naturalized through historical narratives. The idea of a national “we” exists in a world of imagined homelands (Anderson 2013: 179), and authentic belonging is tied to ancestral origins. Migrants, on the other hand, are often trapped in what Anderson calls a “sedentarist bias,” which sees them as people who have no history only origin (Anderson 2013: 179). This places them in a permanent position of partial or incomplete membership in society. Anderson ultimately warns that no state can fully control migration by allowing only those with the “right values” to cross its borders (Anderson 2013: 180). This shows how othering functions as a powerful tool for disciplining both migrants and citizens, while also reinforcing social hierarchies in modern nation-states.

2.6.2 Belonging Beyond Integration: Everyday, Emotional, and Political Perspectives

Debates on social inclusion have evolved significantly over time, reflecting broader shifts in how societies understand cohesion, difference, and belonging. Social inclusion was often viewed through holistic models of social cohesion and system unity based on the idea of a homogeneous society where individuals are integrated into a shared structure (Wieviorka 2013). But more recent research has shifted focus toward the everyday, lived experiences of individuals their emotions, interactions, and how they make sense of their place in society (Yuval-Davis 2011; Anthias 2008). This shift moves the key questions away from “how integrated are migrants into the existing structure?” (e.g., Esser 2001, 2006; Kalter 2023), toward “how do people experience belonging, non-belonging, and the boundaries of community?” and “how are hierarchies and exclusions produced through these lived experiences?” (Yuval-Davis 2011; Anthias 2008; Anderson 2013;

Schinkel 2017). At the heart of this shift is the concept of belonging, and especially the politics of belonging, as developed by Nira Yuval-Davis (2006). Instead of understanding integration as a one-way process where migrants must adapt to a predefined mainstream, she offers an alternative perspective: one that centers on how people feel, negotiate, and struggle over belonging and exclusion in specific contexts. Her framework asks not how well migrants are adapting, but rather how the very boundaries of community and inclusion are being defined, enforced, and contested. Yuval-Davis (2011) argue that people can “belong in many different ways and to many different objects of attachment” (2011:199). This means that belonging isn’t limited to nationality or group identity it can relate to relationships with people, places, ideas, or even humanity as a whole. Importantly, belonging can be self-defined (how people see themselves), or externally assigned (how others see them). But even the most stable or “natural” forms of belonging are never fixed. As she puts it, belonging is “a dynamic process, not a reified fixity” (2011: 199). In this view, belonging is both relational and emotional. It includes feelings of safety, rootedness, and “being at home,” but also feelings of discomfort, insecurity, and exclusion (Yuval-Davis 2011: 200). However, these emotions don’t exist in a vacuum they are always shaped by larger systems of power structures and by societal narratives about who is allowed to belong and who is not. This is why Yuval-Davis (2006) makes a distinction between *belonging* and *the politics of belonging*. While *belonging* refers to emotional and subjective experiences, *the politics of belonging* refers to the institutional and political mechanisms through which societies decide who counts as a full member, and under what conditions (Yuval-Davis 2006: 204).

To understand this, she identifies three interlinked levels that shape belonging:

1. Social locations – These are structural positions (such as gender, class, ethnicity, citizenship, or migration status) that determine one’s place within social hierarchies.
2. Identifications and emotional attachments – These describe how people feel emotionally and personally connected to certain groups or communities.
3. Ethical and political value systems – These include the moral and ideological frameworks used to judge who belongs and who does not.
(Yuval-Davis 2011: 199).

Compared to structuralist integration models (like those of Esser 2001, 2006), Yuval-Davis’s (2006) approach offers a significant theoretical shift. Structuralists often treat integration as a step-by- step process where individuals acquire language skills, education, and jobs, with identification with the majority society coming last. In contrast, Yuval-Davis (2006) sees belonging not as the final stage, but as a deeply emotional and ongoing process, influenced by broader power dynamics. The biggest difference, though, lies in how each approach sees norms and values. For Esser (2001), integration is a neutral, technical process that can be measured objectively. For Yuval-Davis (2006), belonging

is always political: communities set the rules of who belongs based on their own value systems, which means that inclusion or exclusion is never neutral it's shaped by ideology and power.

Antonsich (2010) identifies two key dimensions of belonging: place-belongingness and the politics of belonging. The first, *place-belongingness*, refers to the personal feeling of being "at home" a sense built through personal memories, family ties, and a connection to a particular place (Antonisch 2010: 647). This feeling is strengthened by stable relationships with people around us, offering emotional safety and a sense of rootedness. Language and culture also play an important role, as they allow individuals to recognize and share the everyday "codes" of a given community (Antonsich 2010:648). Economic stability and legal status further shape whether someone feels secure and accepted in a certain place. (Antonsich 2010)

In contrast, *the politics of belonging* refers to the broader social and political mechanisms that define who is allowed to belong and who remains excluded. These boundaries are maintained through language, institutions, and social norms that draw lines between "us" and "them" (Antonisch 2010:649). Often, dominant groups set the standards for belonging. And even when migrants meet all the formal criteria like speaking the language or having legal residency they can still be viewed as outsiders due to their origins or appearance. That's why belonging is never just about personal feelings it always depends on social recognition (Antonisch 2010:652). Antonsich argues that these two dimensions personal and political must be studied together, since they deeply influence and shape one another (Antonisch 2010:652).

This stands in contrast to traditional structural theories of integration, such as those proposed by Esser (2001, 2006). In Esser's model, what he calls "identificational integration" is the last phase, where an individual adopts the norms and identity of the majority society. Similar views are seen in earlier structuralist thinkers like Gordon (1964) or Portes and Rumbaut (2001), who equate belonging with how well someone has assimilated or functionally "fit in" with the host society.

Antonsich (2010) strongly challenges this approach. He argues that belonging cannot be reduced to identity, citizenship, or indicators of successful integration. Instead, he insists that belonging includes both the personal sense of being at home (place-belongingness) and the political and social processes that determine who is accepted as part of the community (politics of belonging) Antonsich (2010). This dual approach allows for a more realistic understanding of migrant experiences.

As Antonsich (2010) emphasizes, someone can have a job, speak the language, and hold legal status, yet still be treated as "the other."

Recent migration studies show a clear shift away from understanding belonging as something fixed, such as membership in a nation, diaspora, or ethnic group, and instead focus on how belonging is shaped through everyday experiences, emotions, and spatial practices. Rather than assuming that individuals "naturally" belong to predefined groups, Youkhana (2015) proposes that belonging should be examined through everyday routines, spatial practices, and interactions with physical

environments. In her perspective, belonging emerges as a social and material resource, shaped through engagement with surroundings such as city streets, public spaces, shops, and neighborhoods, rather than being derived solely from national or ethnic identities.

By grounding belonging in everyday practices and spatial experience, this perspective also calls into question analytical frameworks that rely on fixed and territorially bounded categories. In this sense, it challenges methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002), which assumes that the nation-state is the primary unit of analysis, as well as certain transnational approaches that continue to operate with relatively stable distinctions such as “countries of origin” and “host countries” (Vertovec 1999; Faist 2000; Anthias 2008). While transnationalism emphasizes mobility and cross-border networks, it often retains elements of the structural thinking it seeks to overcome. In this context, Youkhana’s (2015) material and spatial approach offers an alternative by proposing that belonging should be analyzed “from below,” that is, through the grounded, lived experiences of migrants in urban environments. She argues that the sense of belonging emerges through everyday routines, spatial practices, and repeated interactions with specific places such as walking familiar routes, visiting local shops, or spending time in public spaces. These practices contribute to the formation of a feeling of “being at home” within a particular environment (Youkhana 2015: 16). In this sense, belonging is not derived from abstract identities, but is continuously produced through embodied and spatially situated practices.

This perspective can be situated within a broader shift in migration research, where belonging is conceptualized as an emotional, relational, and situated process, rather than as an automatic outcome of formal integration into institutional structures. Studies by Botterill (2017, 2020), Wessendorf (2017), and Rogaly and Taylor (2019) demonstrate that migrants may meet formal criteria of integration such as language proficiency, employment, and legal status while still experiencing forms of non-belonging. This suggests that belonging cannot be reduced to institutional participation alone, but must also be understood in terms of emotional attachment, social recognition, and everyday interactions.

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Leurs (2020), for example, shows that digital spaces can support the maintenance of social ties and contribute to the formation of belonging that is not exclusively tied to physical location.

At the same time, belonging can be understood as a dynamic and unstable process, continuously negotiated across different contexts. Individuals may experience shifts between feelings of inclusion and exclusion in everyday situations whether in physical environments, social encounters, or mediated forms of communication. As Wessendorf (2020) argues, in super-diverse urban settings, these processes become particularly visible, as recognition, indifference, or exclusion in everyday interactions can significantly influence one's sense of belonging. Similarly, Botterill (2020) points out that even subtle emotional responses such as fleeting moments of connection or discomfort can shape how individuals relate to places and communities.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that belonging is not determined solely by institutional inclusion, but emerges through the interplay of emotions, social relations, and everyday practices. It can therefore be understood not only as an outcome of migration policies, but as an ongoing and situated process shaped by lived experience.

2.6.3 Othering and the Negotiation of Belonging

While the previous chapter explored belonging as something emotional, relational, and shaped by context, it is also important to look more closely at how feelings of not belonging develop in everyday life. Instead of understanding exclusion simply as a lack of integration, some authors argue that these feelings are often tied to specific social situations where people are not recognized as part of the community (Wessendorf 2014; Wessendorf 2017). This shifts the focus away from formal measures of inclusion toward everyday experiences where belonging is either confirmed or questioned. A similar perspective appears in research that highlights the role of personal experiences, social relationships, and feelings of belonging within the host society (Phillimore 2012).

In this context, othering can be seen as a process through which the boundaries of belonging are created and negotiated in daily interactions. It does not only refer to a clear divide between "us" and "them," but also to more subtle situations where individuals are made to feel like they do not belong. In such cases, their presence may seem to require extra explanation, adjustment, or justification (Wessendorf 2017; Neal et al. 2013). These experiences are not always expressed through open conflict or direct discrimination, but often appear in small, everyday patterns of behavior, communication, and perception (Neal et al. 2013).

Neal point out that social differences are constantly negotiated through everyday contact, and that even seemingly neutral interactions can include subtle forms of distancing or boundary making (Neal et al. 2013). In these situations, people may pick up on indirect signals that they do not belong, even if nothing is said explicitly, and this can still affect their sense of safety and acceptance

(Wessendorf 2014; Wessendorf 2017).

These everyday forms of othering often go unnoticed because they are not clearly recognized as exclusion. However, because they are repeated and embedded in daily life, they can strongly influence how people see their place in society (Wessendorf 2014). From this perspective, non-belonging is not only the result of formal barriers, but also of many small situations where recognition and acceptance are missing. This aligns with approaches that understand belonging as something that is constantly shaped, rather than fixed or given (Wessendorf 2014; Wessendorf 2017). Seen this way, othering is a relational and context-dependent process that changes across different situations. A person may feel that they belong in one context, but feel like an outsider in another. This shows that belonging is shaped through interactions, relationships, and specific circumstances, not just through legal status or formal inclusion (Wessendorf 2017; Phillimore 2012). Phillimore especially emphasizes that integration cannot be reduced to measurable or institutional factors, but must also include lived experiences, social ties, and the development of a sense of belonging within the host society (Phillimore 2012).

It is also important to distinguish between formal inclusion and the personal feeling of belonging. Even when individuals are included through education, work, or legal status, they may still experience situations where they are not accepted or seen as part of the community. For this reason, looking at everyday experiences is essential for understanding how belonging is actually lived and negotiated (Phillimore 2012; Wessendorf 2014).

Finally, viewing othering as something that happens in everyday and situational ways opens up new questions about where these processes take place. As more social interaction happens through digital technologies, it becomes important to consider how belonging and non-belonging are also shaped online. Digital spaces can be seen as extensions of everyday life, where relationships are formed and maintained (Hine 2015; Couldry and Hepp 2017).

2.6.4 Belonging in Digital Contexts

Following the previous discussion of the shift from integration to belonging, and the conceptualization of belonging as an everyday, emotional, and relational process, it is necessary to examine the role of digital tools in these dynamics. Online spaces can be taken into account as an important factor when studying how people experience belonging. These spaces can be understood as part of the contexts in which belonging is experienced and negotiated (Hine 2015; Couldry & Hepp 2017). They are not separate from everyday life, but are deeply embedded in it, shaping how individuals communicate, maintain relationships, and negotiate their place within different social worlds (Hine 2015; Couldry & Hepp 2017).

Contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasizes that digital technologies are deeply embedded in social life and play an active role in shaping social relations and identities (Hine 2015; Couldry &

Hepp 2017). Rather than functioning as neutral instruments, digital tools are understood as part of the infrastructures through which people connect, communicate, and make sense of their social world. In this context, digital environments can also be seen as spaces in which processes of inclusion and exclusion take place, influencing how individuals are recognized and positioned within society (Georgiou 2019). This suggests that digital technologies are not only tools of communication, but also part of the social conditions under which belonging is negotiated.

Hine (2015) points out that there is no strict boundary between “the Internet” and “real life”; instead, the internet is deeply embedded in everyday routines. These digital environments capture the small, often overlooked parts of daily life casual jokes, offhand comments, and informal interactions that are difficult to observe in face-to-face settings but highly visible and traceable online (Hine 2015: 165, 178). At the same time, research in digital migration studies highlights that these everyday digital practices play a significant role in how individuals construct and experience belonging in their daily lives, particularly through routine forms of communication and interaction. (Leurs 2020). And if, as Yuval-Davis (2006, 2011) and Antonsich (2010) argue, belonging is less about formal membership and more about emotional attachment and feeling “at home” in a particular environment, then these everyday digital traces become important indicators of how that sense of belonging is created, maintained, or questioned. Rather than being separate from offline experiences, digital interactions are intertwined with everyday social practices, contributing to how individuals are perceived and how they perceive themselves within different social contexts (Leurs 2020; Georgiou 2019).

At the same time, Hine (2015: 195) reminds us that much of daily life still happens offline, and it is often in these non-digital moments that the deeper meaning of digital experiences is shaped. This idea aligns with the understanding of belonging as something that is formed at the intersection of physical space and digitally mediated relationships. In this way, digital technologies can be seen as part of the infrastructure through which belonging is expressed and lived through small, everyday habits that bridge online and offline worlds (Pink et al. 2016).

Couldry&Hepp (2017) go further by asking how society should be understood if the social world is already shaped by technology through the media infrastructures used to connect, communicate, and assign meaning. They argue that social life in the digital age is inseparable from these systems: the basic “building blocks” of interaction how people coordinate, relate, and express themselves are fundamentally mediated by technology (Couldry & Hepp 2017: 12). This also implies that digital infrastructures can shape the conditions under which belonging is recognized or contested, as they structure visibility, communication, and participation within social life (Georgiou 2019). This means that understandings of reality are shaped by the limits, opportunities, and power dynamics embedded in media and communication infrastructures (Couldry & Hepp 2017: 13) For this reason, they propose a “materialist phenomenology” of the social world, one that takes media seriously not only as physical technologies but also as meaning-making processes. Only by combining these

two dimensions, they argue, can society be understood in this age of deep mediatization (Couldry & Hepp 2017: 14).

Together, these perspectives show that digital technologies are connected to how people experience and negotiate belonging. From Hine's view of online traces as part of everyday routines (Hine 2015), to Yuval-Davis's (2006, 2011) and Antonsich's (2010) emphasis on emotional and situated relationships, and finally to Couldry and Hepp's (2017) structural analysis of digital infrastructures, these approaches suggest that belonging should be understood in relation to the infrastructures through which social life is organized and experienced, including the digital environments in which inclusion, exclusion, and recognition are continuously negotiated (Georgiou 2019; Leurs 2020).

2.6.5 Affective Belonging in the Digital Sphere

As emphasized in the previous chapter, the concept of belonging in contemporary theoretical approaches goes beyond fixed categories of identity and formal membership (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Antonsich, 2010). Instead, it is understood as a process that is continuously created through social relations, everyday practices, and lived experiences (Youkhana, 2015; Antonsich, 2010). Belonging, therefore, is not only about "where" someone belongs, but also about how this feeling develops and is experienced in specific social situations (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

This approach can be further understood through the concept of affect in networked publics. Affect is defined as an intensity that connects thinking, emotions, and action, and that can "increase or decrease the capacity to act" (Papacharissi, 2015: 13). Importantly, affect is not the same as emotion; rather, it refers to a broader process through which individuals experience and interpret social reality.

In the context of digital media, this affective dimension becomes especially visible in the way social connections are formed. Networked publics, as the author explains, do not necessarily function as stable communities, but are shaped through shared feelings and intensities that connect individuals at particular moments (Papacharissi, 2015: 9). In this way, belonging can be understood as something that is created through interaction, rather than as a pre-existing category.

Furthermore, insights into everyday digital practices show that belonging is also shaped through the ways individuals present themselves. The author points out that identity in digital spaces develops through "micro-performances" of everyday expression, through which individuals continuously adjust how they present themselves to others (Papacharissi, 2015: 101). These processes suggest that belonging is not based only on stable identities, but also on ongoing presentation and interaction.

Within this framework, the concept of the "networked self" further explains how belonging is formed through digital interactions. This form of self develops through constant connection with others, where identity and belonging emerge through processes of exchange and presence within the

network (Papacharissi, 2015: 112).

It is also important that these expressions are often shaped through informal and stylized ways of communication. The use of humor, irony, and sarcasm, as the author shows, plays an important role in how meaning is created and shared in digital spaces (Papacharissi, 2015: 108). In this context, irony can also be understood as a tool through which individuals express and articulate personal views and inner experiences. As the author states, “irony was combined with provocation as these statements of the self became ways of actualizing inner thoughts and fantasies” (Papacharissi, 2015: 108). Through such forms of expression, individuals not only communicate their views but also build connections with others.

In this way, belonging in digital environments can be seen as a process shaped through affective relations and everyday practices of self-presentation. Instead of coming from stable and fixed categories, belonging develops through shared intensities, interactions, and forms of expression within digital networks.

Finally, examining affective relations in digital spaces shows that they do not necessarily lead to stable communities, but they can still create a sense of connection between individuals (Papacharissi, 2015: 22).

3 Contextual Framework

This chapter contextualizes the research problem by connecting the broader social and political context of Austria with the digital environments that increasingly form part of migrants' everyday lives. Including both contexts is important because understandings of integration are not shaped only through direct social experiences, institutional structures, or public discourses, but also through interactions and content encountered in online spaces.

Rather than treating digital and offline environments as separate spheres, this chapter approaches them as interconnected spaces in which experiences, information, and meanings continuously move between different contexts. This is particularly relevant for the present study, as the research focuses on how members of Generation Z understand and interpret integration in their everyday lives. Since digital media constitute an important part of their daily experiences, situating the research problem within both social and digital contexts allows for a broader understanding of the factors that may influence these perceptions.

3.1 Media Context and Official Statistics as a Basis for Othering

As explained in the theoretical framework, belonging is not a fixed category, but a dynamic process shaped by social positions as well as by ethical and political value systems that define who belongs to a community and under what conditions (Yuval-Davis, 2006). From this perspective, belonging

cannot be reduced to formal indicators such as citizenship or country of origin, since these do not fully reflect everyday experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

However, migration and integration statistics are often based on precisely these types of categories and measurable indicators. Such approaches can be connected to more structural understandings of integration, such as those proposed by Esser (2001), where language acquisition, access to institutions, and legal participation are viewed as important dimensions of integration. One important example is the report *Integration und Diversität* published by the City of Vienna, which serves as a key source for understanding population structure. According to the 2025 report, Vienna had around 2.03 million inhabitants, and 45.7% of young people aged 16 to 24 were classified within administrative migration-related categories (Stadt Wien – Integration und Diversität, 2025). Although the report offers detailed data, it relies on categories such as citizenship, country of birth, and family origin, transforming social diversity into measurable administrative groups.

Similar patterns can be observed in other reports. For example, the OECD report *Indicators of Immigrant Integration* states that “less than half of individuals who have lived in Austria for more than ten years hold the citizenship of the host country” (OECD, 2025). This links integration to legal status and political inclusion. In education, Statistik Austria shows that German language skills represent an important requirement for access to higher education, with most programs requiring a C1 level (Statistik Austria, 2023). In this sense, language becomes a central indicator of integration, even though such measures may simplify a more complex social process.

From a critical perspective, the use of such indicators may also create space for distinctions between those who are considered sufficiently integrated and those who are perceived as not yet fully belonging. Categories such as language proficiency, citizenship, or legal status do not merely describe social realities but can also contribute to defining normative expectations regarding who is recognized as a legitimate member of society (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Schinkel, 2018).

Data from Bildungsdirektion Wien, the institution responsible for the education system in Vienna, show that more than 50% of students in Vienna do not use German as the language of everyday communication at home (Stadt Wien – Bildung, 2024). More specifically, around 59% of primary school pupils do not have German as their first language (Statistik Austria, 2023). While such data provide an important overview of linguistic diversity within the education system, from a critical perspective these categories may also contribute to broader distinctions between groups and to discussions about who is perceived as integrated and who is positioned as different. In this sense, language may become more than a descriptive indicator and can acquire symbolic meanings related to belonging and social recognition.

Such classifications are also reflected in media discourse, where they are frequently presented in

a more problem-oriented manner. In Austrian media, migration is often linked to issues such as social pressure, educational challenges, or security concerns. Statistical data are commonly used within these discussions, particularly in newspapers such as *Kronen Zeitung* or *Heute*, where emphasis is often placed on numbers, “integration deficits,” and cultural differences, contributing to distinctions between “us” and “them.” This becomes visible in specific headlines. In “*Studie: Wie Österreich bei der Integration versagt*”, the phrase “*immer mehr Schüler sprechen daheim nicht Deutsch*” directly associates language use with unsuccessful integration (Kronen Zeitung, 2024a). Similarly, “*Wien: Immer mehr Erstklässler mit Deutschproblemen*” frames language primarily as a deficit by emphasizing that children are unable to sufficiently follow lessons (Kronen Zeitung, 2024b). The article “*Immer mehr Schulanfänger sprechen kaum Deutsch*” includes the phrase “*teachers are sounding the alarm,*” creating a sense of urgency (Kronen Zeitung, 2024c). Likewise, “*Zuzug bringt Schulen und Arbeitsmarkt ins Wanken*” connects migration with instability within social systems (Kronen Zeitung, 2024d).

Overall, these examples show that statistical data on language, education, and demographic changes are often interpreted through narratives that emphasize “problems” or “risks”. This means that statistics are not just neutral facts, but also can potential play a role in shaping how migration is understood in public discourse.

Artikel über Migration

In österreichischen Medien inkl. Titel, Teaser und Artikeltext, in Prozent

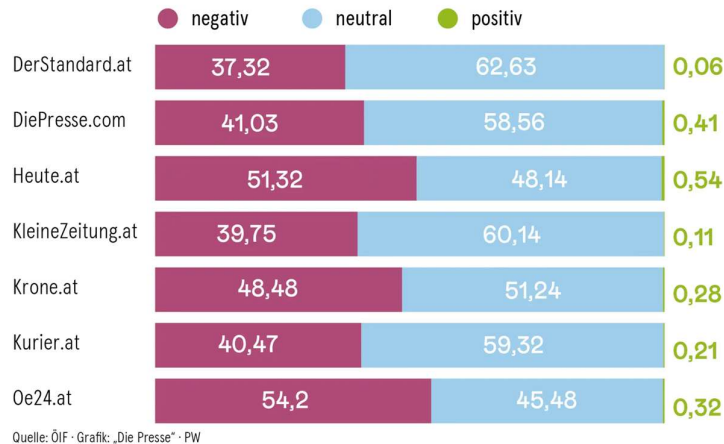


Figure 2. Representation of migration-related articles in Austrian media. Source: ÖIF / Filzmaier (2024),

Beyond individual media headlines, it is also important to examine broader patterns of media reporting in order to better understand how migration and integration are presented in public discourse. One such study, conducted by the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) and based on the analysis of nearly 38,000 newspaper articles published between 2014 and 2024, suggests that representations of migration, asylum, and integration in Austrian media are not distributed equally between positive and negative portrayals (Filzmaier, 2024). While a considerable proportion of

articles can be described as formally neutral, explicitly positive representations are relatively rare, whereas negative framing appears considerably more frequently, particularly during periods of political and social crisis such as 2015/2016 (Filzmaier, 2024).

3.2 Barriers and the *Politics of Belonging* case Vienna

From an analytical perspective, structural inclusion in society, as discussed by Yuval-Davis (2006; 2011), can be understood as shaped not only by the formal availability of rights and resources, but also by the ways in which boundaries of belonging are defined both institutionally and socially. In this sense, the concept of the politics of belonging highlights that societies do more than simply determine who has formal access to rights they also shape how these conditions are organized and who can realistically benefit from them (Yuval-Davis, 2006) This implies that even when legal and institutional frameworks appear formally equal, their design may lead to different outcomes depending on individuals' positions within society.

Importantly, these differences do not always stem from explicit exclusion, rather, they can emerge through more subtle institutional mechanisms that differentiate access to rights and resources. Such dynamics can be understood as forms of indirect *othering*, where formally neutral rules end up producing unequal outcomes across social groups (Hall 1997; Antonsich 2010).

Since this research explores how members of Generation Z understand and interpret integration, it is important to consider the different contexts within which such understandings emerge. While institutional structures shape access to rights, digital environments increasingly represent spaces in which meanings related to migration, integration, and social relations are encountered and interpreted. Rather than approaching these dimensions as separate spheres, this chapter understands them as interconnected contexts that together provide a broader framework for understanding how perceptions of integration are formed and negotiated.

3.2.1 Voting rights and Citizenship Barriers

Empirical research consistently shows that migrants' political participation in Austria is strongly limited by legal and institutional barriers, particularly restrictive citizenship laws. According to the *State of Immigrant Integration – Austria* report, by 2022 less than half of immigrants who had lived in Austria for more than ten years had obtained Austrian citizenship. As a result, more than 600,000 long-term residents did not have the right to vote in national elections (OECD 2025).

Austria also has lower naturalization rates compared to most other major immigration countries. This is partly due to the general prohibition of dual citizenship, as well as additional requirements such as financial stability, German language proficiency at the B1 level, and knowledge of Austrian

history and values (OECD 2025). Even among those who do acquire citizenship, political participation remains lower than among the native-born population. Data from the *European Social Survey* (2012–2020) show that approximately 75% of naturalized immigrants reported voting in the most recent national elections, compared to nearly 90% of Austrian-born citizens. The gap is even more pronounced among younger individuals: only 61% of people aged 18 to 34 with a migration background reported voting, compared to 79% of their peers without such a background (OECD 2025).

In the context of this master thesis, these findings are relevant because they indicate certain limitations of understanding integration primarily through formal and institutional indicators. Within Esser's (2001) framework, integration is understood, among other dimensions, through the inclusion of individuals into social structures and institutions. From this perspective, political participation may be considered an indicator of successful integration (Esser 2001). However, the example of political participation suggests that access to formal rights does not necessarily translate into political participation. Even when individuals acquire citizenship and gain political rights, differences in participation continue to exist (OECD 2025). Public debates and media representations of migration may influence how migrants perceive their own position within society and whether they feel accepted as part of the wider community. In this sense, lower levels of political participation may not be related only to legal barriers, but also to broader processes connected to belonging, social recognition, and the ways individuals perceive their place within society (Yuval-Davis 2006; 2011; Filzmaier 2024).

This suggests that integration cannot be understood exclusively through access to institutions and formal forms of membership, but also through broader experiences of social recognition and acceptance. From this perspective, the concept of belonging becomes particularly important because it shifts attention from formal membership toward the ways individuals perceive their place within society and whether they see themselves as legitimate members of the social and political community (Yuval-Davis 2006; 2011).

3.2.2 Language and Educational Access

In field of education, proficiency in German represents a formal requirement for admission to universities and other tertiary institutions in Austria, particularly for programs taught in German (Universität Wien). According to Statistik Austria, most study programs require proof of German language skills at the C1 level as a condition for enrollment (Statistik Austria; Austrian Universities). Alongside language requirements, students from non-EU countries are required to pay tuition fees of 726.72 euros per semester, whereas Austrian citizens and most students from EU/EEA countries are generally exempt from these fees (Universität Wien – Studienbeitrag). For third-country students, paying tuition is a standard part of the institutional framework of higher education in

Austria, regardless of how long they have lived in the country.

Although students from third countries formally have access to higher education in Austria, different institutional conditions may influence their actual opportunities for participation. In this sense, access to education depends not only on the formal right to enroll, but also on economic, linguistic, and administrative conditions through which this right is realized. In the context of this research, this example highlights certain limitations of understanding integration primarily through inclusion into social structures and institutions. Within Esser's (2001) framework, participation in educational institutions can be considered an important dimension of successful integration. However, the example of higher education suggests that formal access to institutions does not necessarily imply equal opportunities for all individuals. Language requirements and additional financial obligations may shape the ways individuals experience their own position within educational settings and the opportunities available to them. As discussed in previous sections, experiences of belonging are not determined solely through access to institutions, but also through broader processes of social recognition and social positioning. From this perspective, access to education can also be understood through the lens of politics of belonging, which shifts attention from formal membership toward the ways societies define who has access to shared resources and opportunities (Yuval-Davis 2006; 2011).

3.3 Digital Discourse, Integration Policy in Austria

In this context, the analysis focuses on connecting Austria's official policy frameworks with the digital discourses that emerge in online spaces. The key assumption is that institutional frameworks and public discourse are not separate, but closely intertwined processes that together shape how migrants are perceived and how their position within society unfolds in practice. From this perspective, research on online hate speech offers valuable insight into the broader social environment in which integration policies are formed and applied. The study *Social Work's Role in Online Hate Speech Prevention* (Meixner, 2023) shows that hate speech in digital spaces often mirrors existing social inequalities, with migrants and ethnic minorities among the most frequent targets. According to the Meinxner (2023), this type of communication reinforces stigmatizing narratives and can negatively affect integration, particularly when it comes to feelings of belonging and inclusion. Similar conclusions are found in the *NoHate@WebStyria* project (2019–2021), conducted by FH JOANNEUM and the University of Graz. Their findings indicate that hate speech in Austrian online spaces most commonly targets ethnicity, religion, and gender. Analyses of social media and forum content also reveal that discriminatory language often overlaps with political narratives about migration, suggesting a strong link between institutional discourse and everyday communication. Further insight comes from the study *Counter Speech – Young People Against Online Hate* (2022), carried out by St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences and the University of

Vienna. It shows that most young people in Austria have encountered some form of online harassment or discrimination. While the study highlights the presence of counter-speech strategies, it also points to a growing normalization of hate speech in digital communication.

This trend may have long-term effects on how younger generations perceive migrant groups. Altogether, these findings suggest that online spaces are not just reflections of social realities, but active sites where inequalities are reproduced. In this sense, digital discourse plays an important role in constructing “otherness,” often portraying migrants as culturally or socially different from the majority population. Within this broader context, the development of Austrian integration policy can be seen as part of a wider political and discursive framework. Gruber and Rosenberger (2023: 156) argue that the participation of the Freedom Party of Austria in government, together with the Austrian People’s Party, enabled the translation of anti-immigration rhetoric into concrete policy measures. According to their analysis, this has contributed to an integration model that emphasizes control and normative adaptation rather than inclusion. Key elements of this approach include restrictions on certain religious practices, the introduction of mandatory value frameworks, and increased monitoring of migrant populations (2023: 161). At the same time, access to social rights has become more limited due to reduced funding and stricter eligibility criteria, which narrows opportunities for full participation in society (2023: 163). The centralization of integration policies has also weakened the role of civil society organizations (2023: 165), while the overall direction reflects a broader form of populist governance that shapes public opinion (2023: 167). A central component of this framework is the Integration Act (*Integrationsgesetz – IntG*) adopted in 2017. The law defines integration as a process involving both rights and obligations, requiring migrants to actively participate by learning the language and accepting societal norms (§ 1 Abs. 1, BMEIA 2017). It places particular emphasis on the preservation of the “fundamental values of the democratic order,” which are presented as non-negotiable (§ 1 Abs. 2, BMEIA 2017).

Integration is further described as a process involving the whole society, but within clearly defined behavioral expectations (§ 2 Abs. 1, BMEIA 2017). One of its key instruments is the Integration Agreement, which requires third-country nationals to acquire German language skills and basic knowledge of Austria’s legal and social system (§ 7 Abs. 1, RIS 2017). This agreement is structured in two stages (A2 and B1), with fixed deadlines and possible sanctions if the requirements are not met (§ 9 Abs. 2, RIS 2017). Taken together, Austrian integration policy and digital discourse should not be seen as separate spheres, but as interconnected processes that continuously shape and reinforce each other. Research on online hate speech shows that migrants are often positioned as “others” through narratives that emphasize difference, deviation, or lack of belonging (Meixner, 2023; NoHate@WebStyria, 2021). At the same time, institutional analysis indicates that current integration policies increasingly rely on principles of control, conditional participation, and normative adaptation (Gruber and Rosenberger, 2023). When these dimensions are considered together, a

clear relationship emerges between official policies and everyday discourse. Normative elements of integration policy such as the emphasis on language, “fundamental values,” and social adaptation can be understood as shaping the boundaries of belonging at an institutional level (BMEIA, 2017). These boundaries are then echoed and reinforced in digital spaces, where hate speech and stereotypes contribute to drawing a line between “those who belong” and “those who are expected to adapt” (Counter Speech Project, 2022).

From this perspective, these developments can be understood through critical perspectives on integration, which emphasize that ideas of integration emerge within broader social and political contexts (Schinkel, 2017). The Austrian case shows that these boundaries are not established only through laws, but are also reproduced in everyday online interactions (Meixner, 2023). This may create a feedback loop in which institutional frameworks and public discourse reinforce each other, sustaining patterns of exclusion and directly shaping migrants’ experiences of integration.

3.4 Empirical Studies on Migration and Digital Technologies in Austria/Vienna

Contemporary literature on migration and digital technologies often starts from the assumption that digital tools enable migrants to simultaneously maintain transnational connections and achieve successful integration into the host society (see, for example, Kaufmann, 2018; Makrygianni et al., 2022; Kessel et al., 2018). In these works, digital platforms are typically presented as resources that facilitate access to information, strengthen social networks, and expand opportunities for participation (Kaufmann, 2018; Makrygianni et al., 2022). However, such understandings remain largely normative and functionally oriented, as they tend to treat digital technologies as neutral tools, overlooking the ways in which they are embedded in broader relations of power, social hierarchies, and processes of exclusion (Georgiou, 2019; Nira Yuval-Davis, 2011). In this sense, it becomes relevant to ask to what extent digital spaces actually contribute to social participation, and to what extent they reproduce existing boundaries of belonging. Particularly in urban contexts such as Vienna, where digital technologies are deeply embedded in everyday life, it is necessary to analyze how they not only enable connectivity but also shape processes of differentiation, *othering*, and the regulation of access to resources (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Georgiou, 2019). Although the studies mentioned provide valuable insights into the role of digital technologies in migrants' everyday lives, they largely share a common analytical perspective. Digital practices are predominantly interpreted as resources that facilitate connection, access to information, and navigation within new social contexts (Palmerberger, 2022; Kaufmann, 2018; MiDENTITY Project, 2019). As a result, mentioned researches are largely focused on the functional and integrative dimensions of technology use, while questions related to social boundaries, inequality, and experiences of belonging have received comparatively less analytical attention.

Empirical research on migrants' use of digital technologies consistently highlights their potential for maintaining transnational ties and navigating everyday life in the host society. For instance, the study *Internetnutzung Jugendlicher und junger Erwachsener mit türkischem Migrationshintergrund in Wien* (Potkanski & Yildiran, 2010) shows that a significant proportion of young people use the internet to stay in contact with family and friends in their country of origin, while simultaneously engaging with information flows in the host country. Such findings are commonly interpreted in the literature as evidence of parallel participation in multiple social contexts, and as indicators of the transnational character of contemporary migration experiences.

Within this framework, digital platforms – ranging from social media to communication applications and financial services – are primarily understood as resources that enable the maintenance of social relationships, access to information, and the coordination of everyday practices across distance. Similarly, the concept of the Migrant Digital Space (Makrygianni et al., 2022) introduces the idea of a hybrid space in which online and offline dimensions of migration intersect,

emphasizing information exchange, solidarity, and the development of alternative networks of trust. Ethnographic research by Monika Palmberger (2022) further highlights the importance of digital technologies in sustaining intimacy and everyday practices of care, while Kaufmann (2018) identifies their key role in processes of orientation, language learning, access to information, and the maintenance of family relationships among refugees in Vienna. Studies focusing on young people, such as the MiDENTITY project (2019) and the work of Schnelzer, Hintermann and Kern (2021), link digital media to the formation of multiple and hybrid identities, as well as to a strong sense of belonging to multiple social and cultural spaces.

What these studies have in common is that they approach migration, integration, and identity within structuralist and transnational theoretical frameworks. Within these perspectives, digital technologies are primarily understood as resources that enable access to information, support transnational connections, and facilitate migrants' everyday navigation in the host society (Kaufmann, 2018; Makrygianni et al., 2022; Kessel et al., 2018). The work of Makrygianni et al. (2022), Monika Palmberger (2022), and Kaufmann (2018), alongside the MiDENTITY project (2019) and Schnelzer, Hintermann and Kern (2021), demonstrates that digital media expand the spaces of migration, allowing individuals to operate simultaneously across multiple social, national, and symbolic contexts.

However, despite this shift away from traditional assimilation models, these approaches largely remain rooted in structural understandings of integration. The focus tends to remain on functional inclusion, access to resources, and the reproduction of identity frameworks, while insufficient attention is given to how these processes simultaneously reproduce symbolic boundaries between "us" and "them." In this sense, digital practices may contribute not only to inclusion but also to the reinforcement of *othering* processes, through which differences between groups are continuously produced and legitimized (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

A particularly notable gap in these studies is the lack of a deeper theoretical and empirical engagement with belonging as an independent analytical category. Although themes such as identity, networks, and community are present, belonging is rarely explicitly conceptualized as a process that goes beyond formal participation or self-identification. As Yuval-Davis (2006; 2011) emphasizes, belonging is not reducible to identity or legal status; rather, it refers to an emotional, affective, and relational experience of "feeling at home," produced through everyday social practices.

3.5 Global Empirical Research on Digital Practices of Belonging

Recent works on digital migration suggest that belonging is increasingly shaped through networks, algorithm and affective processes that connect the material and the symbolic meanings (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2024; Pahwa, 2025). Rather than viewing digital platforms as parallel spaces, these

authors argue that the digital functions as an infrastructural element of belonging, providing spaces where emotional experiences, collective imaginaries, and everyday negotiations of integration take place (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2024; Pahwa, 2025). In other words, these authors suggest that belonging is increasingly mediated through digital platforms and shaped through everyday online practices such as scrolling, sharing, communicating, and engaging with digital content (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2024; Pahwa, 2025).

This perspective becomes visible across different studies of migrants' everyday digital practices. Across Facebook groups of Latin American migrants in London (te Lintelo et al., 2024), TikTok narratives of Latino migrants in the US and Spain (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2024), meme practices of international students in the UK (te Lintelo et al., 2025), and satirical performances of second-generation youth in the UAE (Pahwa, 2025), a similar pattern emerges: belonging appears not as something that is "found," but as something continuously produced through digital practices that connect material needs with emotional experiences.

When members of London-based FB groups recommend jobs, rooms, or lawyers specifically in places like Elephant & Castle³ they're not only exchanging information, but re-inscribing that neighborhood as a "Latin district," an emotional and social anchor (te Lintelo et al. 2024: 5). When Latino migrants on TikTok share short videos about experiences of racism, work, nostalgia, or everyday routines, they engage in what has been described as *platformed belongings*, forms of belonging that emerge through interactions between users and platform structures such as algorithms, trends, and digital formats (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2024). And when international students in the UK share memes about stress, culture shock, or academic pressure, they form micro-communities of "collective survival," where memes function as emotional "regulators" and boundary objects. (te Lintelo et al. 2025).

In all these cases, belonging is neither static nor neutral: it is performative, situated, and affective. It emerges in relation to infrastructure not only urban, but also digital. A Facebook group in London functions as "arrival infrastructure," a form of social logistics for new migrant (te Lintelo et al. 2024: 3); TikTok offers different genres of agency through which migrants represent themselves, offer help, give advice, or protest (Jaramillo-Dent et al. 2024)

2024); student memes reflect their *acculturation curve*, the transition from their home cultural codes to hybrid and local forms (te Lintelo et al. 2025). All these digital practices reflect what Papacharissi (2015) describes as affective publics, where emotions, interactions, and shared digital practices create forms of connection and belonging that emerge through everyday communication and participation

This insight is especially clear in Pahwa's concept of *ironic belonging* (Pahwa 2025). While London Facebook groups and student memes foster belonging through practicality and emotional solidarity,

³ Elephant & Castle is a district in South London associated with large Latin American migrant communities.

the satirical performances of Hadeel Marei and Mohanad Al Hattab⁴ create belonging through irony, humor, and "digital drag." They perform exaggerated roles as "Dubai kids," but through irony express both emotional attachment to the UAE and frustration with their exclusion from citizenship. Here, digital humor becomes a political tool: *disbelonging* transforms into belonging. The audience recognizes these narratives as authentic, and *affective publics* form around them communities born from shared laughter, memes, and everyday satirical storytelling, rather than from formal politics (Pahwa 2025; Ahmed 2010).

When these studies are read together, they suggest that belonging in the digital age may be understood as emerging at the intersection of three dimensions:

1. Material and infrastructural – digital spaces help migrants find jobs, housing, documents, and resources; they're part of urban survival strategies (te Lintelo et al. 2024; Jaramillo-Dent et al. 2024).
2. Affective and symbolic – communities emerge through memes, jokes, irony, nostalgia, and everyday narratives; belonging operates as an emotional economy (te Lintelo et al. 2025; Pahwa 2025).
3. Platform-mediated and algorithmically shaped — belonging is both enabled and constrained by the architecture of the platforms; algorithms open and close spaces of visibility, creating new forms of digital bordering (Jaramillo-Dent et al. 2024; Noble 2018; Benjamin 2019).

Migrants "make place" digitally, but in doing so, also transform physical spaces; they build communities through humor, and those jokes become the foundations for micro-political identities; the narratives they share act both as support systems and as mechanisms of discipline, reproducing integration logics from within the community itself (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascreñas 2014).

The shared conclusion across all these works is that migrants are not passive users, but active digital producers of belonging. They use platforms to negotiate identity, generate collective emotions, shape new forms of cosmopolitanism, and even to critique the power structures that govern migration. Belonging is no longer defined by homeland, documents, or ethnicity, but by everyday digital practices that create a sense of community where no formal one exists.

Taken together, these studies suggest that migrants should not be understood as passive users of digital technologies, but as active participants in the production and negotiation of belonging.

⁴ Hadeel Marei and Mohanad Al Hattab are digital content creators known for producing humorous and satirical content that often uses irony to comment on social stereotypes and everyday life in the UAE.

Through digital platforms, they engage in practices that shape identities, collective emotions, and forms of social connection (Papacharissi, 2015; Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2024; Pahwa, 2025). These findings further indicate that everyday digital practices may create additional spaces for belonging and community beyond formal structures of inclusion.

4 Methodological Framework

This chapter outlines the methodological framework of the master's thesis and explains how the research interest and research question are addressed in the empirical part of the study. The thesis focuses on members of Generation Z who have moved to Vienna, Austria, and examines how they perceive and define the concept of integration, as well as the role of digital tools in shaping these understandings. In this thesis, integration is not understood as a linear process but rather as a dynamic and socially constructed phenomenon that develops through ongoing interactions. For this reason, a qualitative research approach is adopted, as it allows for a deeper exploration of how members of Generation Z who have moved to Vienna interpret and experience the concept of integration. The following sections present the research methodology and describe how the empirical part of the study was conducted.

4.1 Research Interest and Research Question

The research interest of this thesis is situated within the broader theoretical and socio-political framework of the study. On the one hand, it builds upon the analysis of the political and legislative discourse on integration in Austria, presented in Chapter 3.4, in which integration is predominantly conceptualized through institutional, normative, and administrative frameworks. However, the aim of this research is not to simply build upon these perspectives, but rather to empirically examine and complement it with perspectives grounded in everyday experiences. On the other hand, the study draws on theoretical discussions of integration presented in Chapters 2.1 and 2.2, which critically problematize structuralist approaches that understand integration primarily as an institutional process.

Furthermore, the research interest is connected to the concept of *belonging*, as elaborated in Chapter 2.6, which allows for an analysis of the subjective dimensions of integration and experiences of social inclusion from the perspective of the actors themselves. In this sense, the thesis explores not only how gen Z migrants use digital technologies in their everyday lives, but also whether and how their engagement with platforms such as Instagram, As outlined in the introductory section (See 1.2), particular attention is given to the ways digital platforms such as

Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube influence how members of Generation Z understand integration, migration, and belonging within the host society. In this context, the thesis examines how everyday engagement with digital technologies shapes their perceptions and interpretations of integration.

4.1.2 Qualitative Approach

As outlined in the previous section, this thesis explores whether and how digital technologies influence the ways members of Generation Z understand and interpret integration, othering or belonging, which is why a qualitative research approach was adopted to examine these subjective perceptions and experiences. In contemporary research on digital technologies and belonging, belonging is increasingly understood as a processual and digitally mediated phenomenon that can be examined through everyday practices on digital platforms (te Lintelo et al. 2024; Pahwa 2025), which makes a qualitative research approach particularly suitable for analysing the meanings that social actors assign to their own experiences, practices, and social processes, as well as the ways these meanings are produced and expressed in everyday contexts (Flick 2019)

According to Flick (2019), qualitative research is based on the assumption that social reality is not given in advance but is constituted through interactions, communication, and interpretative practices of social actors. This type of approach is particularly relevant for studying integration as a social phenomenon that does not appear in everyday life primarily through institutional frameworks but is instead shaped through personal experiences, social interactions, and contextual practices. In migration studies, critiques of methodological nationalism have highlighted the limitations of research that relies on predefined national or ethnic categories. Instead, scholars emphasize the importance of examining integration and belonging through everyday practices and processual social relations (Nowicka & Cieslik 2014: 2). In this sense, a qualitative approach allows integration to be explored from the perspective of those who experience it, without imposing normative or administrative definitions of the concept.

4.2 Research Design

4.2.1 Sampling design

The research sample was formed using purposive sampling, which is considered particularly suitable for qualitative research focused on the analysis of subjective experiences, meanings, and everyday social practices (Flick, 2019). Unlike quantitative research, where the goal is statistical

representativeness, qualitative research focuses on selecting participants who can provide detailed insights into the phenomenon being studied through their experiences. Since the aim of this thesis was to examine how Generation Z migrants understand integration, as well as whether and how digital technologies influence these experiences, participants were selected according to predefined criteria directly connected to the research question.

The inclusion criteria for participation in the research were:

1. Belonging to Generation Z

The study included participants belonging to Generation Z, that is, a generation of young people who grew up with digital technologies, social media, and the everyday use of the internet. The focus on this generation was important because contemporary literature indicates that digital technologies play a significant role in shaping identity, social relationships, everyday practices, and feelings of belonging among younger generations.

2. Migration experience and living in Vienna

The second criterion referred to participants who had migrated from another country and who currently live in Vienna. Vienna was selected as the research context due to its pronounced migration balance and high degree of ethnic and cultural diversity. As a city that has experienced a continuous increase in international migration in recent years, Vienna represents a particularly relevant context for researching everyday experiences of integration, belonging, and social interaction among migrants (City of Vienna 2025).

3. Active use of digital technologies

The third criterion referred to the active everyday use of digital platforms and social media, such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and other online spaces of communication. The active use of digital platforms enabled participants to reflect on their own experiences of online communication, digital content, and everyday interactions within digital spaces in relation to experiences of “integration.”

Mia: is 28 years old and comes from Bosnia and Herzegovina. She moved to Vienna in 2017, when she was 19 years old. She first studied Russian language and literature, and later transcultural communication with a focus on translation studies. During her time in Austria, she worked various jobs in order to financially support herself.

Marija: is 26 years old and comes from Russia. She moved to Vienna in 2014, shortly before her fifteenth birthday. She completed a degree in sociology at the University of Vienna and is currently

finishing her studies in psychology. She currently works in the field of refugee and migrant support.

Jovan: comes from Serbia and has been living in Vienna since his early twenties. During his time in Austria, he studied and worked in various professional fields. Jovan identifies as a member of the LGBT community.

Ivan: is 24 years old and comes from Russia. He moved to Vienna at the age of 19 in order to study. He currently works in the social sector.

Hrvoje: is 29 years old and comes from Zenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He moved to Vienna at the age of 18 after completing secondary school.

Hasan: came to Vienna in 2015 as a refugee from Iraq. He completed secondary school in Vienna and currently works in the social sector.

Dunja: is 24 years old and comes from Serbia. She moved to Vienna at the age of 19. She graduated from the Academy of Music and is currently waiting for employment in her professional field.

Helena: is 24 years old and comes from Bosnia and Herzegovina. She moved to Vienna at the age of 19 and is currently still studying.

4.2.2 Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

The empirical data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews using an interview guide. This method is widely used in qualitative research because it combines a clear thematic structure with the flexibility of an open conversation, allowing participants to describe their experiences and perspectives in their own words (Flick 2019). In methodological literature, semi-structured interviews are described as interviews in which key topics and guiding questions are prepared in advance, while still leaving space for a natural flow of conversation and additional questions during the interview itself (Dannecker & Vossmer 2014: 158–159). The use of this method made it possible to address important themes relevant to the research question, such as the everyday use of digital technologies, experiences of social interaction on digital platforms, and participants' reflections on their understanding of integration. At the same time, the semi-structured format allowed participants to elaborate on their answers and highlight aspects that were particularly relevant to their own experiences. The advantage of this approach lies in the combination of comparability between interviews through a shared thematic framework and the opportunity to gain deeper insights into the perspectives and everyday realities of the participants (Dannecker & Vossmer 2014: 158).

The interviews were conducted with the help of a previously prepared interview guide (see Appendices 2) that included open-ended questions and thematic blocks related to the focus of the

study. The guide served as an orientation during the conversation, but the order of the questions was not strictly fixed, which allowed the interview to follow the natural flow of the conversation and the perspectives of the participants. Methodological literature highlights that interview guides should be thematically structured while still allowing flexibility in the order of questions to support a natural and open conversation (Dannecker & Vossmer 2014: 160).

Before the interviews began, participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the use of the collected data, after which they voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Following the ethical principles of qualitative research, particularly informed consent and voluntary participation (Flick, 2019), the interviews were conducted in the language most comfortable for the participants. Accordingly, the conversations took place in German, English, or Serbo-Croatian.

An overview of the interviews is presented in Appendix 1, which includes a table with basic information such as the pseudonyms of the participants (e.g., Ivan – I01), the mode of the interview (in-person or video call), and the duration of each interview. The interview guide itself is included in Appendix 2, where the questions used in the interviews are listed in the respective languages. After the interviews were conducted, all conversations were transcribed and prepared for analysis, and the transcripts are presented in Appendix 3. The collected material was analyzed using qualitative content analysis, a method that allows the systematic structuring and interpretation of textual data by identifying key meanings, thematic patterns, and categories relevant to the research question (Dannecker & Vossmer 2014: 97).

4.2.3 Data Analysis: Qualitative Content Analysis

The method selected for the analysis of the collected data in this thesis was qualitative content analysis. Content analysis enables the structured examination of communicative content, as well as the interpretation of participants' statements in relation to the research question. According to methodological literature, qualitative content analysis can be defined as a structured and categorical analysis of textual data (Kuckartz 2018). Qualitative research can also contribute to understanding the meanings people assign to their experiences and everyday life practices, since the data collected through this type of research are interpreted within the context in which they occur (Flick 2019). The primary aim of content analysis is the examination of communicative content produced through various forms of communication, such as texts and interviews (Deutschmann in Dannecker & Vossmer 2014: 95). In the context of this thesis, qualitative content analysis was used to analyze interviews with Generation Z migrants in Vienna, with the aim of identifying patterns in their understanding of integration and the role of digital technologies in shaping their perception of integration as a concept. Within qualitative content analysis, communicative content is examined in a categorical manner, which enables the identification of both explicit and latent meanings in the text (Stamann et al. 2016). The process of content analysis will be explained in greater detail in the following chapter.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis represents a method for the systematic interpretation of textual data within their communicative context (Mayring 2014). Within this approach, texts such as interviews or documents are analyzed through processes of coding and category formation, which allow the structuring and interpretation of the research material. The aim of this method is the reduction and organization of complex textual data in order to identify relevant themes and patterns of meaning in relation to the research question (cf. *ibid.*). In this process, categories may be developed deductively, on the basis of theoretical assumptions, or inductively, on the basis of empirical material (cf. *ibid.*).

Further methodological development of qualitative content analysis is associated with Kuckartz (2018), who emphasizes the thematic structuring of data through a sequence of analytical steps. This approach includes an initial familiarization with the material, followed by the development of main categories, systematic coding, and the further development of subcategories. The final phase is focused on interpreting the results in relation to the research question. Particular emphasis is placed on the transparency of the entire analytical process, especially through the clear documentation of how categories were constructed and applied (cf. *ibid.*).

1. Category-Based Analysis

The foundation of qualitative content analysis lies in working with categories, which represent the central analytical instrument. Categories serve to systematically structure and organize textual material, enabling the connection of relevant parts of the text with the research question. Categories may be developed deductively, on the basis of theoretical assumptions, or inductively, on the basis of empirical material, and may be further developed and modified throughout the analytical process (Kuckartz 2018). In this thesis, the main categories were formed deductively on the basis of the theoretical concepts presented in the thesis, such as integration, belonging, othering, and digital technologies. During the analysis of the interviews, additional subcategories were also developed inductively from the participants' statements themselves, including German language proficiency, feelings of social acceptance, experiences of discrimination, humor in digital spaces, and the maintenance of transnational contacts through social media.

2. Systematic Procedure and Analytical Rules

Qualitative content analysis involves a clearly defined and transparent analytical process conducted through predetermined steps. Such a systematic approach ensures methodological rigor and enables the research process to be traced, while clearly defined coding rules contribute to consistency in the interpretation of textual data (Kuckartz 2018). The analytical process was

carried out through repeated reading and coding of the interview material, during which participants' statements were continuously compared and connected to the research question. In this way, it was possible to identify different patterns in interpretations of integration, including understandings of integration as functional inclusion into society, but also ironic and sarcastic attitudes toward dominant expectations of integration and participants' own stigmatization as migrants. Systematic coding also enabled an analysis of the ways in which participants reinterpret experiences of belonging, social recognition, and migrant identity through everyday and digital interactions.

3. Analysis of the Entire Material

Unlike approaches that focus only on selected illustrative excerpts of data, qualitative content analysis aims to encompass and classify the entire research material. This enables a comprehensive overview of the themes and patterns emerging within the texts, as well as the identification of similarities and differences between different cases or participants (Kuckartz 2018). Within this thesis, the analysis of the complete interview material enabled the connection of different thematic units and their interpretation in relation to the theoretical concepts presented in the thesis. For example, statements related to language and everyday functioning were analyzed in relation to Esser's (2001) concept of acculturation, while simultaneously being compared with interview sections referring to experiences of othering and social distance.

4. Hermeneutic Reflection of the Data

The analytical process includes continuous reflection on the meaning of textual statements and the context in which they emerged. Inspired by the hermeneutic tradition, qualitative content analysis is based on the assumption that the meaning of a text cannot be understood without considering the communicative context, the interaction between researcher and participant, as well as the researcher's prior knowledge (Kuckartz 2018). Since the author of this thesis also possesses personal experience of migration and life in Vienna, particular attention was paid to the reflexive consideration of the author's own position during the interpretation of the interview material. Some interviews were conducted in the participants' native language, which was also the native language of the author of the thesis, enabling more open communication and a more detailed expression of the experiences and meanings participants attributed to their everyday migrant experiences.

5. Orientation Toward Research Quality Criteria

Qualitative content analysis seeks to ensure methodological reliability and transparency throughout the analytical process. Particular importance is attached to clearly documenting the coding process, the development of categories, and the possibility of intersubjective verification of results, including efforts to achieve agreement between coders when multiple researchers participate in the analysis (Kuckartz 2018).

This combination of a systematic analytical procedure and an interpretative approach makes qualitative content analysis particularly suitable for research aimed at understanding the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of participants within a specific social and communicative context (Kuckartz 2018.).

4.2.4 Qualitative Content Analysis: Analytical Procedure

After presenting the basic methodological characteristics of qualitative content analysis in the previous chapter, this section shifts the focus to the specific analytical procedure used to process the empirical material.

As Kuckartz proposes a sequential analytical process that moves from the initial familiarization with the textual material, through the development and application of a category system, to the final interpretation of the results. Such an approach enables a transparent and methodologically controlled implementation of the analysis, where each step of the analytical process can be clearly documented and followed throughout the research (Kuckartz 2018).

The following section presents an overview of the seven analytical steps of qualitative content analysis according to Kuckartz, which provide the practical framework for analyzing the interviews in this study.

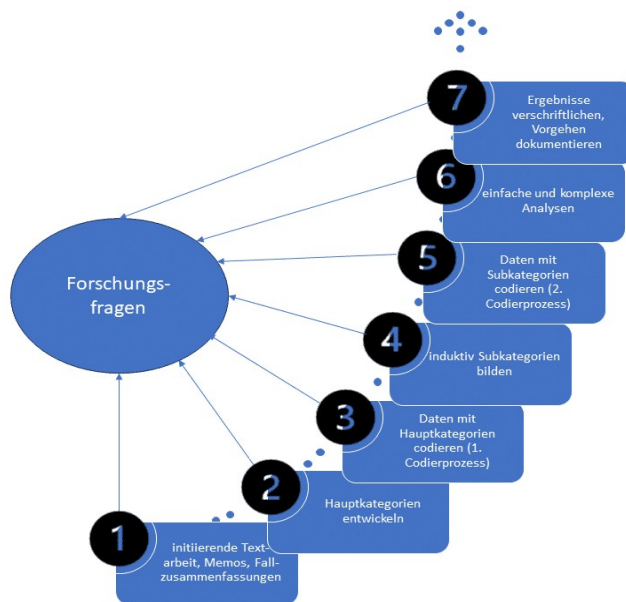


Figure 3. Novustat (Statistik-Blog), Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse nach Kuckartz.

The process of content-structuring qualitative content analysis begins with the initial engagement with the text. In this phase, the researcher familiarizes themselves with the collected empirical material through careful and systematic reading of the interviews (Kuckartz 2018). During this process, relevant themes are identified and important parts of the text are marked in order to develop an initial understanding of the material in relation to the research question Kuckartz 2018.).

At the same time, the researcher writes analytical notes in the form of memos, in which ideas, observations, and first interpretative reflections that arise during the analysis are recorded. These memos represent an important part of the analytical process, as they allow the documentation of the researcher's insights, which can later be used in the interpretation of the results (Kuckartz 2018). In this phase, short summaries of individual interviews (case summaries) are often prepared, which provide an overview of the main characteristics of each case and facilitate later comparisons between participants (Kuckartz 2018:100).

In the next phase, the main thematic categories that form the basis of the analysis are developed. These categories may emerge from the research question, the theoretical framework of the study, or the interview guide, but they may also be complemented by themes that appear relevant during the initial reading of the material (Kuckartz 2018:101–102). Based on this defined category system, the first coding process follows, in which textual segments of the interviews are assigned to the corresponding main categories. Coding is carried out sequentially by going through the text from the beginning to the end of each interview, which enables an initial thematic structuring of the empirical material (Kuckartz 2018: 102–105). After that, the categories are further differentiated through the inductive development of subcategories, which allow for a more precise distinction between themes within the main categories (Kuckartz 2018:105–109).

In the following step, a second cycle of coding is conducted in which the material is analyzed again using the expanded system of categories and subcategories. In this way, textual segments are classified more precisely and a more detailed structuring of the data is achieved (Kuckartz 2018: 109–110). After the coding process is completed, the analysis and interpretation of the data begins, focusing on identifying patterns, similarities, and differences in the participants' statements, as well as relationships between categories and subcategories. In the final stage, the results of the analysis are systematically presented in the research report and interpreted in relation to the research question and the theoretical framework of the study, ensuring transparency in the research process (Kuckartz 2018: 117–120).

Based on the research question and the theoretical framework, an initial system of main categories was developed for the interview analysis, which forms the basis for the first cycle of coding. In accordance with the methodological approach proposed by Kuckartz (2018), these categories were defined deductively, meaning that they were derived from the central concepts of the research, while the subcategories will be developed inductively during the further analysis of the empirical material.

The initial category system in this study consists of three main categories: (A) understanding of

integration, (B) belonging and digital practices, and (C) experiences of exclusion and othering.

Category A - Understanding of integration includes all statements in which participants talk about how they themselves understand the concept of integration. Within this category, segments of the interviews are coded in which participants describe what being integrated into the society in which they live means to them, as well as which dimensions of integration they consider most important. Particular attention is paid to whether participants primarily associate integration with institutional aspects, the labor market, or language proficiency, or whether they view it more broadly as a process of everyday social inclusion and belonging.

Category B – Experiences of Othering and Belonging in Everyday Life includes statements in which participants describe everyday situations through which they experience social inclusion, exclusion, recognition, or distance. This category encompasses interview segments related to experiences of othering, social marginalization, and symbolic boundaries between “us” and “them,” but also statements referring to feelings of acceptance, connection, and belonging within everyday social interactions. Particular attention is given to the ways in which participants negotiate their sense of belonging through interactions in educational institutions, workplaces, public spaces, and digital environments. The analysis of these statements makes it possible to examine how experiences of both othering and belonging shape processes of identification and social recognition.

Category C – Belonging and Othering in Digital Practices includes statements in which participants describe their experiences with digital media content and online platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and other social media environments. This category focuses on how participants engage with digital content, algorithms, humor, memes, comment sections, and online discussions, as well as how these digital practices shape their feelings of belonging, recognition, exclusion, or social distance. Particular attention is given to the ways participants encounter migrant-related representations and stereotypes online, but also how they use digital content to identify with shared experiences, humor, language, and cultural references. Through these statements, it becomes possible to analyze how digital media environments and algorithmically shaped content contribute to processes of belonging and othering in the everyday life.

In addition to these three main categories, several subcategories emerged inductively during the analytical process through repeated reading and coding of the interview material. Within the category of integration, the analysis identified themes related to integration as functional inclusion and language as symbolic capital. The category focused on belonging and othering in everyday life further developed through participants' experiences of social exclusion, institutional othering, and everyday forms of belonging. Finally, within the category related to digital practices, the analysis

identified themes connected to digital networks and everyday belonging, digital discourses and experiences of exclusion, as well as affective belonging in digital spaces. These subcategories enabled a more detailed organization and interpretation of the empirical material.

4.2.5 Software: *Whisper* and *DeepL*

For the purposes of processing and analyzing the empirical material collected during this research, several digital tools were used as technical support during the stages of transcription, translation, and linguistic revision of the interviews. Since the research included eight semi-structured interviews conducted in different linguistic contexts, the use of digital technologies contributed to a more efficient organization and processing of the material.

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed using OpenAI Whisper, an artificial intelligence based automatic speech recognition tool. Whisper was primarily used to facilitate the initial transcription process and to convert spoken language into written text. Given the qualitative character of the research and the importance of preserving contextual meanings, emotional expressions, pauses, and specific formulations used by participants, all automatically generated transcripts were subsequently manually reviewed and corrected by the researcher. In addition, DeepL was used during the translation process of selected interview excerpts, particularly in cases where participants switched between different languages or used expressions characteristic of everyday communication.

4.3. Reflection on the Research Process

Reflection on the research process in qualitative research is connected with interpretative approaches that emphasize that empirical data and their interpretation emerge within a specific research context and through the interaction between the researcher and the research participants (Flick 2019; Denzin & Lincoln 2018). In this sense, the process of collecting and analyzing data involves continuous reflection on the researcher's position, the communicative context of the interviews, and the ways in which meanings are articulated during the interviews.

In methodological literature, interviews are described as a form of social interaction in which knowledge is produced through the process of conversation itself, rather than as a simple transfer of information from participants to the researcher (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). For this reason, the formulation of questions, the dynamics of the conversation, and the level of trust between the interlocutors can influence the content of the responses (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009).

One aspect that may shape the research process relates to the position of the researcher (Flick 2019). The author of this master's thesis also has personal experience of migrating from Serbia to

Austria for the purpose of studying, which makes the research position partially close to the experiences of the interview participants. After arriving in Austria, the author attended a preparatory German language course and later continued studies in Vienna, thereby gaining experience of everyday adaptation to a new social environment, communication in a foreign language, and various institutional procedures connected to the migrant experience. This includes processes related to regulating residence status, extending visas, and navigating administrative requirements connected to living and studying in Austria. In addition, living and working in Vienna enabled the author to gain direct contact with different migrant experiences and everyday integration practices.

In qualitative research, such a position is often described as an “insider–outsider” perspective, because the researcher simultaneously shares certain social and biographical elements with the participants while at the same time maintaining the analytical position of an observer (Flick 2019; Denzin & Lincoln 2018). Such a position may have influenced different phases of the research process. During the phase of approaching the topic and formulating the research interest, personal experiences of migration and living in Vienna influenced the focus on everyday experiences of integration, feelings of belonging, and the role of digital technologies within migrant experiences. Personal experiences with administrative procedures, language learning, and adaptation to a new social context contributed to a greater sensitivity toward questions related to feelings of acceptance, social distance, and everyday forms of inclusion within society. At the same time, the author also actively uses digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and other social media, as well as content frequently mentioned by the participants during the interviews. This includes following migrant-related, humorous, and everyday digital content connected to the lives of migrants in Austria and the broader European context. Such experiences enabled a better understanding of certain references, forms of humor, and digital practices described by participants during the interviews.

During the data collection phase, shared experiences of migration and living in Vienna potentially facilitated the establishment of trust and more open communication during the interviews. Some participants spoke spontaneously about experiences related to bureaucratic procedures, residence permit extensions, language learning, finding one’s place within society, or feelings of insecurity during the first years of living in Austria. In addition, conversations about digital platforms, internet humor, and content related to migrant experiences often developed spontaneously, without the need for additional explanations of specific digital references. It is possible that the perception of the researcher as someone with similar experiences contributed to a greater degree of openness during the conversations and more detailed descriptions of everyday migrant experiences.

At the same time, such closeness to the topic required continuous reflection during the phase of data analysis and interpretation in order to avoid projecting personal experiences and assumptions onto the participants’ statements (Flick 2019). During the analytical process, particular attention was paid to ensuring that interpretations were grounded in the empirical material and in the

differences between participants' experiences, rather than in the assumption of a shared migrant experience. This was especially important in the interpretation of digital content and feelings of belonging that develop within online spaces, since there was a possibility that the researcher might perceive certain digital practices as "familiar" or self-evident due to personal experiences with similar platforms and content. Reflection on the researcher's own position was also important during the theoretical interpretation of the literature, particularly in connecting participants' subjective experiences with the concepts of integration, belonging, othering, and digital technologies. In this sense, reflexivity was not understood as an obstacle to research, but rather as an integral part of the qualitative research process that contributes to a more transparent understanding of how empirical data and their interpretations are produced (Denzin & Lincoln 2018; Flick 2019).

5 Empirical Findings and Analysis

In the empirical part of this master's thesis, a qualitative analysis of the collected data will be presented and connected to the theoretical framework in order to answer the main research question. The chapters will be organized according to the following categories: integration, experiences of othering and belonging, and finally the role of digital technologies in the participants' perceptions.

5.1 Interpretations of Integration

As stated in the methodological section of this thesis (see 4), eight participants took part in the research. At the beginning of the interviews, participants were asked to explain what the concept of integration meant to them. This question was placed at the beginning of the empirical section because the way participants understand integration simultaneously opens a broader understanding of their migration experiences. The analysis is not organized exclusively around predefined theoretical categories, but rather follows the dominant patterns that emerged in the participants' narratives. Nevertheless, their interpretations can be connected to different theoretical approaches discussed in the theoretical part of the thesis. Among the most common interpretations were understandings of integration into adaptation to dominant social norms (see I04;I03), but also as a process connected to belonging, social recognition. (see I07)

For some participants, integration was associated with the ability to function independently within the host society (see I08;I05). Themes such as language, communication, everyday interactions, and understanding social rules appeared particularly frequently in their responses. Such understandings of term integration can be connected to structuralist approaches, especially Esser's model (2001), in which the dimensions of *culturation* and *interaction* represent important preconditions for social inclusion. Similarly, Ager and Strang (2010) identify *language*, *cultural*

knowledge, and *social connections* as key conditions of “being integrated”.

Esser’s (2001) concept of *culturation* can be recognized in several participants’ understandings of integration, particularly in the ways they connect integration with acquiring cultural knowledge and understanding the norms. In this sense, integration was often described not only as learning the language, but also as understanding everyday social practices and being able to participate in them. This can be particularly observed in Marija’s statement, in which she describes integration as “understanding the cultural practices of a place where you live and also being able to participate in them,” but also as “understanding how life works and being connected.” (I08:101)

Her response reflects Esser’s (2001) dimension of *culturation* because it emphasizes adaptation to the social and cultural environment of the host society. At the same time, Marija does not reduce integration to formal knowledge of language or institutions, but also connects it with “engaging with people from the culture” and “understanding humor” (I08:101). In this way, her statement introduces a more phenomenological dimension of integration, since integration is not understood only as adaptation to external structures, but also as a subjective and relational experience in which the individual positions themselves as an active participant in social life and everyday interactions.

A similar dynamic can be recognized in Ivan’s statement, in which integration means “life without any kind of assistance from translators.” (I05:93). Although this understanding can also be interpreted through Esser’s (2001) concept of *culturation*, since language competence represents a prerequisite for independent functioning and access to institutions, his statement simultaneously carries a broader symbolic meaning. In this context, the absence of the need for a translator does not refer only to linguistic competence, but also to autonomy, security, and the feeling of being able to participate in society independently. Similar to Marija’s response, Ivan’s understanding of integration therefore moves beyond purely structural inclusion and introduces a more subjective dimension of belonging, in which the migrant is positioned not merely as someone adapting to society, but as an active social subject capable of participating in and navigating everyday life on their own terms. (I08, I05)

In addition to language and everyday interactions, job also played an important role in participants’ experiences of integration. Hasan particularly emphasized the workplace as a space of integration:

“I experienced integration mostly through work... You learn how other people interact and how to communicate with them.” (I05:85)

The limitations of structuralist approaches to integration can also be observed in Hasan’s response. Although his understanding partly corresponds to Esser’s (2001) perspective, particularly through the emphasis on employment and participation in social structures, Hasan simultaneously positions himself as an active participant within the integration process. As he explains, integration means “having a job, learning how people function, and communicating with others.” (I05:85). While these

elements can be connected to structural understandings of integration through labor market participation and everyday interaction, Hasan's statement also introduces a more subjective dimension of integration (see I05). Rather than presenting integration as a passive process of adaptation to external norms, he emphasizes his own role within everyday social life through learning, interaction, and participation. In this sense, work becomes not only a mechanism of structural inclusion, but also a lived social experience through which he actively negotiates relationships, develops familiarity with the social environment, and positions himself as a participant within society.

Similarly, Dunja described integration as "coming into another culture," accompanied by developing awareness of the differences between "our culture and the culture of the people who live here," as well as "respect for those differences." (I01:83) Her understanding can partly be again connected to Esser's (2001) concept of *culturation*, since it emphasizes learning about the cultural norms and social environment of the host society. However, Dunja does not describe Essers (2001) position of *culturation* as simple adaptation or passive acceptance of dominant norms. Instead, she positions herself as an active and reflective participant within this process by emphasizing awareness, interpretation, and respect for cultural differences (See I01). In this sense, the individual does not appear merely as an object of integration, but as a thinking social actor who actively reflects on different cultural positions and negotiates their meaning in everyday life. Integration can therefore be interpreted not as a linear process of one-sided adaptation, but as a continuous process of interpreting and reconciling different cultural experiences and social expectations. In this way, her statement partially departs from classical structuralist approaches to integration and moves closer to the approaches discussed in Chapters 2.5 and 2.6.

Helena understands integration as an "attempt to belong to a group of people that represents the majority," but with a degree of irony she also states that migrants are expected to "camouflage ourselves as Austrians."(I03:88). The very use of the term "camouflage" suggests that integration is not experienced as spontaneous inclusion into society, but rather as a process of concealing differences in order to become socially accepted. In this sense, her statement can be interpreted as an indication that belonging depends on migrants' ability to reduce their visibility as "others." A similar view was expressed by Hrvoje, who responded cynically by stating that migrants should "observe them and try to do what they do," adding that "good integration" when: "you came to our place, so you have to follow our rules." (I04:89) Although this statement may initially appear as support for an assimilationist understanding of integration (See 2.2), the way it was formulated, as well as the tone of the interview, leaves room for a more critical interpretation. Hrvoje's formulation can also be understood as an ironic reproduction of dominant discourses about integration, reflecting the societal expectations frequently imposed on migrants (see 2.6). For this reason, his statement does not necessarily represent full agreement with such approaches, but may instead indicate an awareness of the pressure migrants experience to conform in order to be accepted

within the host society.

In both cases, integration appears as a process of adaptation to the dominant culture, where social acceptance depends on migrants' ability to adopt the norms and behavioral patterns of the majority society. Such narratives can be connected to assimilationist models discussed in Chapter 2.2, but also to critical approaches to integration presented in Chapter 2.6.1. Particularly relevant here is Bridget Anderson's (2013) concept of the "community of value," according to which society functions through symbolic distinctions between those considered "good" and legitimate members of the community and those who remain positioned as "others." Within this framework, belonging does not appear as a universal right, but as something that must be earned through alignment with dominant social norms and expectations.

Legal status, which is emphasized by authors such as Esser (2001) and Ager & Strang (2010) as an important precondition for "integration", was also described by Jovan as significant for participation and everyday functioning within society. During the interview, he referred to a period in which he lived without proper documents, which created feelings of insecurity, discomfort, and uncertainty in everyday life (see 106). However, Jovan simultaneously emphasizes that legal recognition alone is not enough for a person to develop a sense of belonging within society. As he explains, integration for him means "a sense of belonging on some level," "not being invisible," "having a certain place in society," and "being treated as an individual and not as a passport first." (107:98) In this sense, although legal status remains important, Jovan's statement suggests that integration also depends on social recognition, visibility, and the possibility of being perceived beyond one's migrant identity.

In addition to functional and normative understandings of integration, some participants also expressed critical understandings of the concept itself. In these interpretations, integration is not experienced as a neutral process, as it is often presented within structuralist approaches (Esser 2001), but rather as a concept that carries implicit expectations and pressures directed toward migrants. Mia, for example, explained that the concept of integration has gradually acquired a negative connotation for her:

"When I hear the word integration, it now has a negative connotation for me... integration is one of those ideas that sounds perfect on paper..." (106:96)

Her statement suggests that structural understandings of integration and the dimensions associated with them, such as language acquisition, labor market participation, and adaptation to social norms (Esser 2001), may appear coherent and idealized on a theoretical level, while simultaneously carrying different meanings and experiences in everyday life. In this sense, Mia's response points toward a gap between official integration discourses and the lived experiences of migrants, which she further elaborates throughout the interview.

Overall, although the participants frequently connected integration with structural forms of inclusion into society, they simultaneously emphasized the subjective dimension of the social actor, including their own emotions, interpretations, attitudes, and everyday experiences, rather than positioning themselves as passive observers of the integration process. In other words, while language acquisition, employment, and legal residence were often associated with being “integrated,” the participants continuously attributed their own meanings and contextual interpretations to these categories. Their responses therefore suggest that integration cannot be understood solely through formal or structural indicators, but must also be understood through the subjective experiences and perspectives of migrants themselves.

5.1.1 Language as Symbolic Capital

German Language appears throughout the analyzed interviews as one of the central dimensions through which participants describe integration, belonging, and their everyday relationship to the host society (See I01; I02; I06; I03). However, the analysis shows that the meaning of language in the participants’ experiences extends beyond its purely functional role. Although many participants expressed understandings of language that are close to structuralist approaches to integration, language simultaneously emerges as a symbolic marker of social recognition, legitimacy, and acceptance. In this way, the category of language itself reveals the distinction between the structuralist models of integration presented in Chapter 2.4 and the phenomenological or subjective approaches to belonging analyzed in Chapters 2.6 and 2.6.2.

As mentioned for many participants, understandings of language corresponded to the models proposed by Esser (2001) and Ager and Strang (2008; 2010), according to which linguistic competence and cultural knowledge represent important prerequisites for successful integration (See I01;I02;I06;I03). Within these interpretations, language appears as an important condition for everyday functioning and participation within society. This understanding is particularly visible in Dunja’s statement when she explains that “language is one of the most important things, if not the most important,” adding that once a person learns the language “all doors are open.”(I01:83) Her response reflects an understanding of integration as a process of acquiring the competences necessary for independent functioning and participation within the host society.

Nevertheless, the analysis demonstrates that the meaning of language for participants does not stop at the practical dimension. For several participants, language also appears as a question of social recognition and symbolic legitimacy. This becomes especially visible in the part of Dunja’s statement in which she explains that local people “feel respect toward people who manage to learn the language at a high level.” (I01:83) This aspect suggests that language functions as a form of symbolic capital that influences how migrants are socially valued and accepted. Such an understanding can be connected to Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of linguistic capital discussed in

Chapter 2.5.1, according to which ways of speaking shape an individual's social legitimacy within a particular social field.

Hasan, for example, states:

“Die Sprache ist schon schwer genug... Bis jetzt kann ich nicht so gut... Ja... Weil Integration hab ich nicht so ganz.” (I05:85)

His statement reflects understandings of language similar to those discussed by Esser (2001), where linguistic competence appears as an important condition for integration and participation within society. However, Hasan's response simultaneously shows that language does not function only as a practical tool of communication, but also as a symbolic marker that shapes perceptions of who is considered “integrated” and who is not. Particularly significant is the fact that Hasan himself connects his insufficient language proficiency with the feeling that he is “not fully integrated.” In this sense, language becomes connected not only to communication, but also to self-perception, and the feeling of “not belonging within society”. In this way, his statement moves beyond the level of individual experience and raises the question of integration as a normative framework through which migrants also evaluate their own position in society. Such experiences can be connected to the critical approaches to integration discussed in Chapter 2.6.1, particularly with Schinkel (2017; 2018), who demonstrates how integration functions as a mechanism of continuous evaluation of migrants according to the standards of the majority society. In addition to the subjective sense of belonging, the analysis also demonstrates that language functions as an important mechanism of social stigmatisation. Mia, describes situations in which people “could not immediately recognize that she was a foreigner,” because they assumed “that she was from Germany,” which meant that they “treated her differently right away.” (I06:95) Unlike Hasan's experience, which is more connected to an internal feeling of distance, Mia's statement demonstrates external mechanisms of social differentiation and othering.

It is particularly significant that Mia associates positive experiences precisely with situations in which her migrant identity was not immediately recognizable. In this way, accent, fluency, and ways of speaking become symbolic markers through which it is determined who is perceived as “part of society” and who is perceived as “the other.” Such experiences directly connect to Chapter 2.6.3 on everyday othering, since they demonstrate that the boundaries of belonging are produced not only through institutions, but also through everyday interactions, perceptions, and social categorizations.

At the same time, Mia's statement can also be connected to Social Identity Theory discussed in Chapter 2.5.2, because it demonstrates how social identity is shaped through processes of categorization and distinction between “us” and “them” (Tajfel & Turner 1986). In this sense, language functions not only as a means of communication and an element of adaptation within structural approaches to integration, particularly in Esser's (2001) understanding of cultural integration and language acquisition (see 2.4), but also as a mechanism through which social

boundaries and processes of othering are produced and reproduced in everyday interactions (Wessendorf 2014; Wessendorf 2017; Neal et al. 2013).

5.2 Belonging and Othering in Everyday Contexts

In order to better understand the participants' perceptions about integration, the following category analyzes their statements related to experiences of *belonging* and *othering* in everyday life situations. These statements include various situations from daily life, including the work environment, education, social interactions, and contact with institutions.

The analysis of these experiences is important for this thesis because it provides insight into the ways participants perceive their social position and their relationship with the host society. Based on their experiences, it becomes possible to better understand how processes of *belonging* and *othering* are shaped through everyday interactions, as well as how they influence feelings of acceptance, inclusion, or exclusion. Their statements will further be interpreted in relation to relevant theoretical approaches in order to provide a deeper understanding of these processes in everyday contexts.

5.2.1 Negotiating Belonging through Everyday Experiences

Belonging among the participants was not connected to one clearly defined understanding of belonging nor to a linear process of "successful integration." Unlike the structuralist approaches to integration presented in Chapter 2.4, according to which belonging mainly represents the final stage of "successful integration" into society through work, language, and institutions (Esser 2001; Ager & Strang 2008; 2010), the participants' experiences demonstrate that belonging much more often emerges through everyday interactions, emotional security, and routine. In this sense, their statements are closer to the phenomenological and relational approaches to belonging presented in Chapters 2.6 and 2.6.2, particularly in the work of Antonsich (2010), Yuval-Davis (2006; 2011), and Youkhana (2015).

For many participants (see I04, I03, I02, I08), belonging develops through everyday contact and routine interactions. In these experiences, work, language, and social networks (Esser, 2001) are important, not primarily because they represent indicators of being "integrated," but rather because they reduce social distance and help create feelings of security and belonging in everyday life. Marija, for example, connects changes in her sense of belonging within the host society with employment and everyday contact with German-speaking people.

"I feel like it's become better since I started working because I actually came into contact with more Austrian and German-speaking people. And I kind of overcame my fear of talking to Austrian and German-speaking people." (I8:101)

Her statement can partially be connected to the integration models of Esser (2001) and Ager and Strang (2008; 2010), in which work, language, and social contacts represent important dimensions of inclusion into society. However, what is particularly significant is that Marija does not primarily describe *per se* belonging through employment, but through *overcoming fear* and gradually developing a sense of comfort in everyday interactions, which related her statement more with phenomenological perspective discussed in section 2.6.

For some participants, belonging is not primarily connected to work, language, or formal inclusion into social structure, but rather to feelings of safety and the possibility of freely expressing one's identity. It is particularly interesting that such understandings of belonging appear precisely among participants who identify as members of the LGBT community, demonstrating that belonging in their experiences is not related solely to migration, but also to the possibility of social acceptance of their identity. In this sense, belonging among these participants is not primarily connected to national belonging, but rather to questions of, emotional security, and the possibility of functioning in everyday life without fear or the need to hide parts of one's identity. (See 2.6.2)

Ivan, for example, states:

“I feel much more accepted here than in my country of origin. I can exist here freely and 99% without any kind of shame or fear for my life.” (I05:93)

Unlike structuralist approaches to integration, which mainly connect belonging with successful inclusion into social structures, Ivan's statement demonstrates that belonging may primarily be connected to emotional and existential security. Particularly significant is the fact that belonging here is not related to national identity or formal status, but rather to the possibility of existing “without fear.” In this way, his response confirms Nira Yuval-Davis's (2011) understanding of belonging as an emotional and political question connected to social recognition and the right of individuals to be accepted as legitimate members of the community. At the same time, his statement also demonstrates the limitations of classical integration models discussed in Chapter 2.4, since “inclusion” does not explain why a person may feel safer, more accepted, or freer in one society than in another.

On the other hand, the analysis demonstrates that for some participants belonging was not connected to identification with society as a whole, but rather to finding a place within specific social networks and alternative social spaces (See 2.6.2). This dimension is particularly visible in Jovan's statement. Jovan, who also belongs to the LGBT community, does not describe belonging through identification with society in a broader sense, but rather through the possibility of finding a place within certain social circles:

“In my own way, I think I have definitely managed to find a place for myself in society on a personal level. I can’t say that I belong in the classical sense, but I would say in an alternative way, within certain specific circles.” (I07:100)

Belonging for some participants functions as a partial and situational form of belonging to particular social circles, rather than as complete identification with dominant social norms (see I07). It is especially significant that Jovan distinguishes between “classical” and “alternative” belonging, thereby implicitly suggesting that society does not function as a neutral space, but rather as a normatively structured framework in which certain identities and social positions are more accepted than others (see Chapter 2.6).

The comparison of these two statements demonstrates that belonging among LGBT migrants does not necessarily emerge through identification with society as a homogeneous whole, but much more frequently through negotiating spaces of acceptance and social recognition. While Ivan emphasizes the possibility of “existing without fear,” Jovan describes belonging through finding alternative spaces of belonging within a society that he still experiences as normatively structured. In this sense, their statements can be connected both to Yuval-Davis’s (2011) concept of the *politics of belonging*.

For some participants, belonging also develops through solidarity and alternative support networks (see I02). For Hasan, belonging is not primarily connected to the majority society, but rather to the migrant initiative “Klub Ensemble,” through which he describes experiences of mutual help, translation, and everyday support among migrants. His experience suggests that belonging is not something migrants passively receive from the host society, but rather something actively produced through shared practices and social relationships. In this sense, Hasan’s statement reflects forms of belonging that emerge through alternative social circles and networks of solidarity. This understanding can be also connected to Yuval-Davis’s (2011) concept of the *politics of belonging*. At the same time, Hasan’s experience points to certain limitations of structural approaches, which often place greater emphasis on inclusion into dominant social institutions and social structures (see 2.4), while paying less attention to alternative forms of community and everyday practices through which individuals themselves create a sense of belonging.

For some participants, belonging also appears in a much more ambivalent form, which particularly demonstrates that belonging is not necessarily a stable or clearly defined category. Hrvoje, for example, states:

“Even now... I have some seanse of belonging, or maybe it’s just routine, I can’t really tell.”
(I04:90)

Unlike classical integration models, which understand belonging as a clear result of “successful

integration,” this statement demonstrates that belonging may emerge gradually and almost imperceptibly through routine, repetition of everyday practices, and familiarity with space. Precisely for this reason, his response strongly corresponds to the phenomenological approaches to belonging developed by Youkhana (2015) and Antonsich (2010), where belonging emerges through everyday experiences of inhabiting space, routines, and gradually developing relationships to the place of residence.

Viewed as a whole, the analysis demonstrates that belonging among the participants cannot be explained exclusively through the “formal indicators of integration” discussed within the structuralist approach to integration in Chapter 2.4, such as work, language, or institutional participation. Although these elements are important, participants often gave them subjective meanings that went beyond their structural role. Rather than perceiving work, language, or participation as goals in themselves, they frequently described them as meaningful because they enabled social relationships and contributed to feelings of acceptance and belonging.

5.2.2 Othering and Social Exclusion in Everyday Contexts

Experiences of *othering* appeared as one of the most prominent themes across the interviews. Compared to discussions about integration, which were often described through broader definitions and shorter explanations, participants tended to speak more openly and extensively when reflecting on situations in which they felt different, excluded, or treated unequally. References to schools, workplaces, institutions, and everyday interactions repeatedly emerged in these discussions, indicating that belonging and exclusion are not experienced as isolated moments, but as ongoing processes that shape how individuals understand their place within the host society.

At the same time, these experiences reveal that the structural-functionalist understanding of integration discussed in Chapter 2.4, particularly within Esser’s (2001) framework, may also contribute to the formation of social boundaries in everyday life. Categories such as language proficiency, cultural adaptation, and participation are commonly presented as mechanisms that facilitate integration into society. However, the interviews suggest that these same elements may simultaneously function as criteria through which individuals are evaluated as sufficiently “integrated,” “accepted,” or perceived as legitimate members of society. When participants deviated from these expectations through their accent, migrant background, or cultural differences, they often described experiences of distance, different treatment, and processes of othering within the majority society.

This is particularly visible in experiences related to language and accent. Several participants described situations in which they were treated differently once their origin became “visible” through the way they spoke or through their national background (see I03;I05). Mia, for example, explains that people often changed their behavior once they learned she came from the Balkans:

“..until they don’t know that I am from the Balkans, say all kinds of things, and then when I say where I’m from, they suddenly go silent.” (I05:97)

A similar pattern appears in experiences related to accent and linguistic insecurity. Helena describes unpleasant reactions in everyday situations:

“When you go to a café, order coffee and don’t say it correctly... they look at you badly or make some rude comment...” (I03:88)

In both cases, language functions not merely as a means of communication, but as a symbolic marker of social legitimacy. Such experiences can be again connected to Bourdieu’s (1991) linguistic capital discussed in Chapter 2.5.1, since they demonstrate that certain ways of speaking possess greater social value and enable easier social acceptance. While Esser (2001) primarily understands language as a tool of “functional inclusion”, the participants’ experiences demonstrate that accent and ways of speaking simultaneously determine whether a person will be socially recognized as “part of the community” or as someone who remains outside of it. (see 2.6.3)

In addition to language, the interviews also reveal experiences in which migrant origin influences access to resources and everyday opportunities (see I03;I05;I07). For some participants, names, surnames, or national backgrounds function as markers that shape access to housing or administrative procedures. Speaking about apartment hunting, Mia describes:

“I don’t know how much it is about my name and surname... that I’m not from Austria... when it comes to apartments, landlords... usually you don’t even get a response.” (I08:96)

Such experiences demonstrate that *othering* does not remain only on the symbolic level of everyday interactions, but also acquires material consequences through restricted access to resources. In this way, the interviews confirm the critical approaches discussed in Chapter 2.6.1 For other participants, experiences of *othering* are less connected to specific incidents and more to long-term feelings of conditional belonging. Particularly significant is the fact that for some participants these feelings appear even when they are “formally integrated” through having a legal status. Hrvoje describes this in the following way:

“I always have this feeling in the back of my mind that this is not yours... that you are basically just a guest here.” (I04:92)

Despite stable employment and EU documents, his sense of belonging remains limited by feelings

of temporariness and distance. Such experiences directly confirm the phenomenological critiques of structuralist integration models discussed in Chapter 2.6, since they demonstrate that institutional participation alone does not automatically produce a feeling of “being at home.” Unlike structuralist approaches (see 2.4), in which belonging appears as the final stage of successful integration, the interviews demonstrate that formal inclusion and subjective feelings of belonging do not necessarily go together.

For some participants, the boundaries of *belonging* are no longer implicit, but become openly expressed through direct messages of *othering*. Hasan describes an experience from public transportation:

“Du gehörst nicht hier... kannst du wieder in dein Land leben... hier ist unser Land...”
(I02:85)

Unlike the more subtle experiences described by other participants, *belonging* here is directly connected to the right to exist within host society. Particularly significant is the fact that Hasan’s exclusion is justified through the idea that some people “belong,” while others remain permanently foreign. Such statements directly correspond to Anderson’s (2010) concept of the “community of value,” according to which societies symbolically construct boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate members of the community.

At the same time, the analysis demonstrates that experiences of *othering* among participants are not shaped only through individual interactions, but also through broader social and political discourses surrounding migration (see I07). This becomes particularly visible in experiences related to administration, migration procedures, and public discourse about migrants. For some participants, there is a strong feeling that migrant status becomes the dominant social category through which institutions and society perceive them.

Jovan describes this in the following way:

“It was a huge burden, that feeling of how migration is criminalized here... you are just a sheep or a number in the system...” (I07:98)

This statement demonstrates that *othering* for some participants emerges not only through everyday micro-interactions, but also through institutional and political frameworks (which will be discussed further in the following chapter) that reduce migrants to administrative categories. For this reason, his experience confirms Schinkel’s (2018) critiques of integration regimes discussed in Chapter 2.6.1, according to which integration functions not only as a mechanism of inclusion, but also as a system of classification and control that determines who is considered an “accepted” member of society.

5.2.3 Institutional Othering and Limited Social Participation

While experiences of *othering* in the previous section of the research were mainly shaped through everyday interactions, language proficiency, and social perceptions, the interviews simultaneously demonstrate that the boundaries of *belonging* are also reproduced through institutional frameworks. In this way, the participants' experiences indicate that *othering* is not only the result of individual encounters or social stereotypes, but also of administrative procedures, legal regimes, and economic conditions that shape possibilities for participation in society. Precisely for this reason, the empirical findings confirm the critical approaches to integration discussed in Chapter 2.6.1, according to which integration regimes do not function exclusively as mechanisms of inclusion, but also as systems that determine the boundaries of legitimate social membership (Schinkel 2018; Varela 2013).

At the same time, several participants demonstrate that education, language, and legal status do not function exclusively as mechanisms of inclusion into society, as they are primarily represented in structuralist integration models such as Esser's (2001) or the Ager-Strang model (2004; 2010). Although these approaches define language, education, and access to institutions as key prerequisites "for successful integration", the interviews reveal that the same categories frequently appear in everyday experiences as sources of insecurity, pressure, and evaluations of migrants' "adequacy." (see I02;I03;I07) In this way, educational and administrative institutions do not function only as "spaces of inclusion", but also as spaces in which migrants develop feelings of othering. This dynamic is particularly visible among international students. For some participants, the educational system was not experienced solely as a space of social mobility, but also as a space of differentiation between "domestic" and "foreign" students. Helena describes this in the following way:

"German was very demanding to studies... the procedure for taking the language exam was very complicated and difficult... those of us who come from abroad have to pay significantly more... I was under enormous pressure... every failed exam felt like the end." (I03:87)

Her experience challenges Esser's (2001) assumption of a relatively linear process of integration in which education and language gradually lead to belonging. In Helena's case, precisely those categories that are supposed to "facilitate integration" become sources of additional pressure and *othering*. Particularly significant is the fact that she does not perceive administrative procedures and language requirements as neutral criteria. In this way, her statement further supports Schinkel's (2018) critique of integration regimes.

A similar logic of institutional evaluation also appears in experiences related to legal status and citizenship. Although Ager and Strang (2004; 2010) define legal status, citizenship, and language

as key conditions for “having sense of belonging”, the interviews demonstrate that these same categories can become instruments through which it is determined who is “sufficiently integrated” to achieve “full social legitimacy”. This becomes particularly visible in Hasan’s case (see I02). Despite living and studying in Austria for many years, he associated the rejection of his citizenship application with not possessing a B2 language certificate. At the same time, he describes fear related to the appeals process:

“Ich habe keine Beschwerde gemacht, weil sie hat mir auch Angst gemacht. Sie hat gesagt, wenn du Beschwerde machst, das kann sein, dass der Gerichtskosten auf dich auch fallen.”
(I02:86)

His statement demonstrates that for some participants language does not function merely as a means of communication or participation, but also as a normative criterion of institutional evaluation. For this reason, Hasan’s experience further supports Schinkel’s (2018) argument that integration functions as a system for evaluating migrant legitimacy and “adequacy.” At the same time, his fear of the appeals process reveals an important distinction between formally possessing rights and the subjective feeling of being able to actually exercise those rights. In this sense, his experience corresponds to Anderson’s (2013) approach, according to which institutions produce not only rules of inclusion, but also feelings of conditional belonging.

In addition to legal status and education, several participants also raised the issue of the economic conditionality of participation in society. Particularly significant is the fact that international students are expected to be financially independent, while institutional frameworks simultaneously restrict their ability to achieve such independence in practice. In this way, the interviews demonstrate that participation in society depends not only on individual effort or “motivation for integration,” but also on structural and economic limitations. Marija describes this in the following way: “I feel like the hardest part about this whole thing is that if you’re on a student visa and you can’t find a job, you have to have a lot of money in your bank account.” (I08:102) Similarly, Mia speaks about the limitations imposed by student work permits: “As students, we were only allowed to work 20 hours per week instead of 40... and working 20 hours was not enough for me to cover all my expenses.” (I05:95) For both participants, institutional limitations become visible in situations where migrants are expected to become economically independent, while legal and administrative structures simultaneously restrict their opportunities to actually achieve that independence, which in turn contributes to experiences of *othering* and social exclusion.

Marija’s account points to the ways in which administrative procedures and institutional practices may reproduce symbolic boundaries between migrants and the majority society (see I08). She describes situations in which Russian migrants are subjected to increased control and additional difficulties in accessing basic services, such as opening bank accounts “they check extra hard if

you're from Russia... I've heard of cases of people not being able to open a bank account" (I08:102). In this sense, national origin appears not merely as a formal category, but as a socially and politically loaded marker that shapes migrants' everyday experiences.

Viewed more broadly, the participants' experiences suggest that institutions and administrative procedures do not function only as neutral mechanisms of regulation, but may also contribute to feelings *othering*. In this context, Mia's earlier statement that integration "sounds perfect on paper" (see I05:96) can be understood as a critique of the gap between formal expectations and migrants' everyday experiences of social acceptance and recognition (see Chapter 2.6).

5.3 Digital Networks in Everyday Contexts and Experiences of Belonging

The final category of analysis focuses on participants' perceptions of the role of digital technologies and social networks in their everyday lives. This segment of the analysis is particularly important for the research question of the thesis because it enables a better understanding of the ways in which digital technologies influence migrants' perceptions of integration. Unlike the previous categories, which focused on experiences of *othering*, and *belonging*, the focus here is placed on the participants' everyday digital practices, the content they consume, and the meanings they assign to these practices within the context of life in the host society.

The analysis of the interviews demonstrates that digital networks among the participants do not function merely as tools of communication and information, but as an important part of everyday experiences through which they develop relationships with the city and society in which they live (I03; I05; I06; I01; I03; I08). The empirical findings largely confirm the theoretical approaches presented in Chapters 2.6.2 and 2.6.4, particularly the perspectives of Hine (2015) and Couldry & Hepp (2017), according to which digital technologies constitute an integral part of contemporary social reality and everyday forms of social connectedness. At the same time, the interviews also demonstrate that digital networks possess a strong emotional dimension for participants, since they foster a sense of belonging to the local community and urban space (See I05; I08). For some participants, digital content also becomes a space through which they question dominant representations, stereotypes, and their own position within the host society, as well as the ways in which they imagine themselves as part of everyday social life.

For Maria and Mia and Ivan, digital platforms were primarily associated with navigating urban space and gradually becoming familiar with the city (see I08; I06; I05). However, the interviews demonstrate that behind this "practical" dimension lies a much broader process of developing everyday familiarity with the city. Mia, for example, explains that she uses platforms through which she follows events in Vienna and plans activities:

"There is a website where you can click on a specific day and see what events are happening... from parties to food trucks, music, culture..." (I06:97)

Similarly, Ivan describes social media as an important source through which he became familiar with the city and its everyday environments. His experience suggests that digital platforms do not merely provide information, but also shape how individuals discover and develop a sense of connection with city (see I06). Although at first glance these practices may appear to be connected exclusively to information and leisure activities, their statements actually demonstrate a process of gradual symbolic familiarization with the city. For these participants, digital networks function as mediators through which the city becomes more familiar, less foreign, and emotionally more accessible. For this reason, their experiences can be connected to Youkhana's (2015) approach to belonging, according to which feelings of belonging emerge through everyday spatial routines and experiences of familiarity. At the same time, the empirical findings also demonstrate a certain extension of Youkhana's (2015) approach. For the participants, belonging is no longer shaped solely through direct physical movement through the city, but also through digitally mediated representations of space. The city is not experienced only through personal encounters, but also through online content, recommendations, and visual representations of everyday life. In this way, the interviews demonstrate that digital networks become part of the process through which migrants develop feelings of orientation and symbolic connectedness to urban space.

However, significant differences are also visible among participants in the ways they use digital networks. While Mia and Ivan primarily emphasize the functional dimension of digital networks connected to orientation and activities within the city, Marija's experiences reveal a much stronger emotional dimension. Marija explains:

"I feel like looking at other people's lives is really nice... it's like seeing how other people live here..." (I08:103)

Unlike the previous participants, for whom digital networks primarily serve as tools for navigating space, Marija uses digital content as a way of indirectly participating in social life. It is particularly significant that she describes herself as an introverted person who finds it difficult to establish direct social contacts, which is why online content becomes a space through which she develops feelings of closeness to the city and to the everyday life of the host society (see I08).

Such experiences can be directly connected to Yuval-Davis's (2011) understanding of belonging as an emotional and relational process, as well as to Antonsich's (2010) concept of "feeling at home." For Marija, belonging does not emerge through formal inclusion or a large number of social contacts, but through the gradual development of familiarity, emotional closeness, and imagining herself through digital technologies as part of the social life of the city (see I08).

A particularly important theme that appears in Marija's narrative concerns diversity and expanded possibilities of identification. She emphasizes that it is meaningful for her to see on social media

“different people from different backgrounds, different languages, different social and life situations” (108:103). Such statements demonstrate that digital networks enable some participants to expand possible frameworks of belonging and identification. Belonging therefore becomes connected not only to national identity or complete adaptation to dominant norms of the host society, but also to the possibility for individuals to recognize themselves within diverse lifestyles and social experiences.

5.3.1 Digital Discourses and Experiences of Exclusion

In addition to the functional and connecting role of digital networks, another important category clearly emerges in the participants’ responses the experience of digital othering and symbolic exclusion through online discourses about migrants. Unlike the previous category, where digital platforms were mainly described as spaces of orientation, connection, and everyday belonging, here the digital sphere appears as a site for the reproduction of social boundaries, hierarchies, and feelings othering. It is particularly significant that participants do not speak only about isolated negative comments, but about the constant presence of discourses that portray “migrants as a problem”, or an “unsuccessfully integrated group”.

Across many responses, a recurring pattern can be identified in which language appears as a central marker of “good” and “bad” integration. In this way, digital discourses directly connect to the theoretical approaches discussed in Chapter 2.6.1, particularly Schinkel’s (2018) critique of integration as a normative regime for evaluating migrants. In this sense, integration no longer appears as a neutral process, but rather as a continuous assessment of who is “sufficiently integrated” and who remains symbolically marked as “the other.”

This pattern is particularly visible in Helena’s statement:

“There is a lot of content and advertisements showing the situation in Austria, especially how many people do not speak German... everything revolves around not knowing German and unsuccessful integration... I feel uncomfortable because I am also part of that group...” (103:88)

Her response demonstrates that digital discourses do not remain only at the level of media representation, but become part of the subjective experience of belonging. It is particularly significant that Helena directly associates herself with the group represented as “problematic.” Unlike structuralist approaches to integration developed by Esser (2001) or Ager & Strang (2008), where language is primarily understood as a resource for inclusion into society, here language again as in previous chapters appears as a symbolic criterion of social legitimacy. In this way, the digital sphere reproduces boundaries of belonging through representations of who speaks “well enough,” who is “successfully integrated,” and who remains outside the normatively imagined

community. (see 2.6.1)

At the same time, the analysis demonstrates that negative digital discourses do not produce the same emotional reactions among all participants. While Helena expresses feelings of insecurity and rejection, other participants develop strategies of distance, irony, or critical engagement toward the content they consume. This is particularly visible in Mia's statement:

"I saw comments about remigration online, and they were very negative....I followed Heute and The Standard... mostly I follow them just to see what kind of nonsense they are posting... and it just makes me angry." (I06:97)

Unlike Helena, Mia does not internalize the dominant discourse through feelings of personal inadequacy, but instead develops a critical relationship toward media content. This distinction is particularly important for the analysis because it demonstrates that digital othering does not operate linearly nor produce a uniform experience among migrants. In addition to *othering*, the participants' responses also reveal a pattern of collective responsibility and awareness regarding the ways migrants are represented in public discourse (see I02; I07). Hrvoje describes this through his everyday engagement with media headlines:

"Almost every day when you open a newspaper, you can see that some immigrant did something... and every time you read a headline, you secretly hope: 'I just hope it's not one of ours.'" (I04:90)

This statement demonstrates that media discourses influence not only the perception of migrants by the majority society, but also the ways migrants begin to perceive their own group and themselves. Particularly significant is the phrase "one of ours," because it points toward a process of collective identification and internalization of social representations. In this sense, Hrvoje's response can be connected to Social Identity Theory discussed in Chapter 2.5.2, according to which identity is shaped through processes of group comparison and external categorization. A similar dynamic was discussed in Chapters 4.0, however, Hrvoje additionally supplements this with personal emotional frustration, openly expressing fear of migrants being targeted through negative connotations associated with migrant identity.

A particularly important dimension of this category concerns the role of algorithms and digital infrastructures in shaping migrants' everyday experiences. Hrvoje explains that on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook the content tends to be more negative than positive"and that "the algorithm mostly pushes negative content (see I04). That shifts the focus of analysis from individual comments and articles toward the structure of digital platforms themselves. Negative content does not appear sporadically, but is continuously amplified through algorithmic logics that favor emotionally intense, conflict-oriented, and sensationalist content. Such patterns can be connected to Tufekci (2015), who demonstrates that social media algorithms amplify polarizing

content and users' emotional reactions. At the same time, this complements the argument of Couldry & Andreas (2017) discussed in Chapter 2.6.4, according to which digital infrastructures actively participate in shaping social reality and the ways individuals experience belonging, visibility, and social recognition.

5.3.2 Affective Belonging in Digital Spaces

Unlike the previous category, in which digital networks were mainly connected to experiences of symbolic exclusion and negative discourses about migrants, the participants' responses also reveal another dimension of digital space, digital platforms as spaces, emotional connection, and feelings of recognition. It is particularly significant that for almost all participants, humor, irony, memes, and sarcastic content emerge as important ways through which they reinterpret everyday migrant experiences and reduce feelings of distance toward the host society. (see I02; I03; I04; I07; I08) In this sense, the analysis demonstrates that *belonging* in digital spaces emerges through everyday emotional interactions, shared references, humor, and the feeling that someone "understands" the experience of migration.

At the same time, the findings point to the limitations of structural approaches to integration, such as Esser's model (2001), in which belonging primarily appears as the final outcome inclusion in social structures. The participants' responses show that sense of belonging do not develop exclusively through such forms of "inclusion", but also through everyday emotional and symbolic interactions that take place in digital spaces. Furthermore, the theoretical approaches to belonging presented in Chapter 2.6 can also be extended to online environments, in which feelings of solidarity and belonging are likewise developed. In contrast to approaches to belonging developed by discussed in 2.6, Papacharissi (2015) further expands this understanding by emphasizing its affective and digitally mediated dimensions. In Papacharissi (2015) approach, belonging is not shaped solely through social positions, but also through emotions, everyday digital interactions, humor, irony, and different forms of online self-presentation.

Hrvoje's statement can be further understood through the theoretical approach developed by Papacharissi (2015), particularly through the idea that belonging within digital spaces is shaped through affective forms of online interaction, humor, and shared digital content (see I04). This becomes especially visible as Hrvoje emphasizes that he follows the page Thought Life Austria, where different social positions are often interpreted through irony and sarcasm, while cultural and normative values of everyday life in Austria are humorously redefined. As he himself states:

"I follow a page called Thought Life Austria, where they make jokes about everyday cultural situations..." (I04:91)

He further explains:

"I like to watch stand-up comedians, both local and foreign, because by observing what

people laugh at, I slowly begin to understand what is considered “acceptable” in this society.” (I04:91)

What is particularly significant is Hrvoje’s reference to “everyday cultural situations,” because such situations often contain implicit social expectations, norms, and symbolic boundaries that are not openly articulated within society. The page he follows, characterized by a strong presence of cynicism and irony, may therefore provide insight precisely into those points connected to the politics of belonging discussed in section 2.6. Through humor, sarcasm, and ironic representations of migration, language, bureaucracy, or cultural differences, such content can reveal which forms of behavior and identity are socially perceived as acceptable, desirable, or symbolically positioned as “different.” In this sense, Hrvoje does not use humor exclusively to better understand Austrian society, but also to observe and interpret his own position within these symbolic boundaries of belonging. (See I04)

A similar pattern also appears in Hasan’s experiences, although humor serves a different emotional function in his case. While Hrvoje connects humor with understanding society, Hasan primarily describes it as a way of emotional relief and overcoming negative experiences:

“When people make jokes in German and I understand them, it helps me relax and removes some negative thoughts... helps me think less about discrimination and makes me feel more comfortable.” (I02:86)

What is particularly significant is that Hasan’s statement simultaneously demonstrates that the German language in digital spaces and in the context of humor does not necessarily function as part of the politics of belonging in the sense described by Antonsich (2010) and symbolic boundaries of belonging, but rather the opposite, as a means of relaxation, connection, and the temporary overcoming of feelings of distance. This becomes especially important when Hasan’s experience is compared to an earlier situation in which he was denied citizenship due to the lack of a B1 level of German proficiency, where language functioned as a direct marker of social exclusion and *othering*. In this sense, the participants’ responses demonstrate that the meaning of language is not fixed, but depends on the social and communicative context in which it appears. Such patterns can be connected to the research of Lintela et al. (2025), according to which memes and humorous content function as “affective regulators,” or tools for the collective emotional processing of experiences.

Jovan’s responses, much like Hrvoje’s, point to another important aspect of digital belonging: a reflexive and ironic engagement with migrant identity. He explains that sarcasm and a certain style of humor allow him to experience recognition and closeness with others:

“That kind of sarcasm and level of humor, coming not only from people from our region or

other migrants, but also from youth culture here... makes me feel seen, and it doesn't feel like my experience is something isolated." (107:99)

What stands out in Jovan's reflection is the realization that his experience of migration is no longer perceived as something personal and disconnected, but as part of a wider reality understood by others as well. Through ironic jokes, memes, and self-aware online content, migrant experiences become easier to articulate, interpret, and emotionally relate to.

This dynamic becomes even clearer when Jovan refers to cynical and self-aware portrayals of migrant life:

"there is always a dose of cynicism and sarcasm... I would highlight 'Toxische Pommes'⁵... it really captures the self-aware experience of being a Balkan person living here." (107:99)

His perspective can be linked to Pahwa's (2025) concept of "ironic belonging," where irony and sarcasm function simultaneously as forms of attachment and distancing toward society. In this sense, ironic belonging enables to reflect not only on their own position, but also on the structural and normative expectations (see 2.4) tied to integration and belonging. Through humor and self-reflexive digital practices, these expectations become open to reinterpretation, negotiation, and ironic commentary, allowing migrants to critically engage with dominant ideas (see. 2.4) of what it means to "belong" within the host society.

Several participants also describe an important dimension of collective interpretation of content and shared understanding of cultural references (see 108). Marija explains that certain moments become especially meaningful when she no longer has to mentally "translate" humor and when she begins to understand dialects or the context of jokes:

"Every time I have comedy content on my feed and I don't have to think or translate in my head... it definitely helps you feel like you belong" (108:103)

It is particularly significant that Marija connects belonging with the spontaneity of understanding, that is, with moments in which humor no longer feels "foreign" to her. Unlike some of her earlier experiences in everyday "real life" interactions, where speaking German was associated with insecurity, fear of making mistakes, and feelings of exclusion, humorous digital content appears as a more relaxed and emotionally safer space. In this context, language no longer functions primarily

⁵ Toxische Pommes is an Austrian comedian, satirist, and author born in the former Yugoslavia. She became known through short video sketches on social media in which she ironically portrays themes of migration, integration, Balkan identities, everyday life in Austria, and social stereotypes. Her humor is often based on exaggerating cultural differences and the experience of living between "two cultures."

as a boundary of belonging or as a marker of difference, but rather as a medium through which feelings of comfort. Her response therefore demonstrates that digital spaces may temporarily reduce the pressure often connected to language use in everyday social interactions and create conditions in which migrants can experience belonging in a more emotionally accessible way.

A similar pattern also appears in Helena's experiences, although for her digital humor has a particularly collective and emotional function. She explains that after serious or negative content about migrants, memes and jokes often emerge that recreate feelings of community:

“every time we see something serious, we feel a bit uncomfortable... but then come jokes, memes, and videos that make fun of us and of ourselves... and then we feel belonging again, because we are all in the same group...” (103:89)

This statement is particularly important because it illustrates how belonging within digital spaces can emerge through collective self-irony and the humorous reinterpretation of migrant experiences. The phrase “make fun of us and of ourselves” suggests not only shared amusement, but also a reflexive engagement with one's own social position. Through memes, jokes, and ironic content, migrants are able to reinterpret experiences of exclusion, stereotypes, and difference in ways that make them emotionally manageable and collectively recognizable. In this sense, humor becomes a form of self-reflection through which broader normative expectations surrounding integration are continuously negotiated and reinterpreted (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Expanding this understanding toward affective belonging, these digital exchanges also create moments of emotional closeness and mutual recognition that strengthen feelings of connection among migrants online (Papacharissi, 2015).

A particularly important analytical moment emerged during the conversation with Hasan about the stand-up comedy of Aladdin Jameel⁶. Although the humor in these performances includes stereotypes about migrants and national identity, Hasan does not experience them as discrimination. When comparing this content to his experience of a verbal attack on public transportation, he explained the crucial difference:

“weil er fragt dich, ob es das für dich passt.” (102:94)

This response represents one of the most important findings of this chapter because it demonstrates that the boundary between humor and discrimination for participants does not depend solely on the content of stereotypes, but rather on feelings of participation, consent, and the possibility of interaction. In the stand-up context, Hasan does not feel reduced to a stereotype,

⁶ Aladdin Gedik Jameel is an Austrian stand-up comedian and content creator of Iraqi origin. His work often focuses on migration, identity, cultural differences, and everyday life experiences in Austria.

but rather included within a shared play of reinterpreting, questioning, and ironically reflecting on migrant identity and social position. In this sense, humor creates a space in which the migrant position can be collectively negotiated and emotionally processed, rather than experienced exclusively through exclusion or stigmatization.

Viewed as a whole, the analysis demonstrates that digital humor and affective online practices play an important role in shaping everyday belonging among migrants. Unlike structuralist theories of integration, which mainly understand belonging as the final stage of successful inclusion into society (Esser 2001), belonging here emerges through everyday emotional interactions, shared references, irony, humor, and digital cultural practices regardless of whether a person is “integrated” according to structuralist theoretical approaches. It is particularly significant that humor serves different functions among participants from understanding social norms, to emotional relief, to the creation of alternative forms of community and reflexive relationships toward “integration” and identity.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this master’s thesis was to examine whether and in what ways digital technologies influence perceptions of integration among migrants belonging to Generation Z. In other words, the study focused on understanding how contemporary technological developments, particularly digital media, shape migrants’ social realities, their everyday practices, and their experiences of integration, belonging, and processes of othering.

Starting from the observation that existing literature on digital technologies and migration has predominantly focused on the functional dimensions of digital media, such as communication, access to information, and transnational connectivity, while considerably less attention has been given to their emotional, symbolic, and affective dimensions, this thesis aimed to contribute to addressing this research gap by examining how digital spaces shape migrants’ experiences of belonging, othering, and everyday social positioning.

In order to understand how members of Generation Z experience integration and how these understandings can be situated within a broader social context, the theoretical section of this thesis presented an overview of different theoretical perspectives, ranging from earlier understandings of integration as a process of assimilation characteristic of the beginning of the twentieth century to contemporary theories of belonging and critical approaches to integration. From an epistemological perspective, these approaches can be grouped into two broader categories.

The first category consists of theories that primarily understand integration as the inclusion of individuals into social structures and that are described in this thesis as structuralist approaches to integration. Among their most significant representatives are Esser (2001), as well as Ager and Strang (2010), whose approaches largely constitute the basis of contemporary integration policies

implemented in Austria.

On the other hand, theories of belonging and critical approaches to integration do not understand integration exclusively as a neutral process of inclusion into society, but also as a political and socially normative concept that determines who is allowed to belong to a community and who remains symbolically marked as the “other”(see 2.6). This theoretical orientation, which epistemologically belongs to the phenomenological-critical tradition, places the individual at the center of the integration process, emphasizing emotions, everyday experiences, and subjective understandings of belonging. Unlike structuralist approaches, integration is understood here as a political concept, while the degree of belonging is not measured solely by institutional inclusion.

Following this theoretical overview, a foundation was established for examining the influence of digital technologies on understandings of integration among Generation Z migrants. Members of this generation were selected as the target group because they represent the first generation to grow up alongside information and communication technologies and digital media (Twenge, 2017) To gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ attitudes and experiences, the interviews were divided into several thematic categories. The first category focused on general understandings of integration, within which participants explained what integration meant to them and what meanings they associated with the concept. The second category addressed experiences of belonging and othering in everyday life in Vienna, while the third and most important category explored the role of digital technologies and social media in shaping these experiences.

Although participants initially described integration primarily through categories closely related to structuralist approaches, particularly Esser’s (2001) concept of acculturation, the findings simultaneously reveal certain limitations of this perspective. Participants emphasized the importance of language, employment, and understanding social norms; however, their responses did not remain exclusively at the level of functional inclusion into society. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that participants also understood integration through their own positioning within society, particularly through the emotional dimension of such positioning and the ways in which they personally experienced it.

From an epistemological perspective, the findings of this study also point to certain limitations of structuralist approaches to integration, which predominantly understand social inclusion through predefined categories such as language, education, employment, or institutional participation (see 2.4). Although these dimensions proved to be significant within the participants’ own experiences, the interview analysis suggests that the meanings individuals attribute to these categories are neither stable, universal, nor unambiguous. On the contrary, participants frequently assigned different subjective meanings to the same categories depending on their personal experiences, social relationships, and the everyday situations in which they found themselves (see I02; I04; I07; I08). In their narratives, language did not merely represent a means of communication or an indicator of successful integration, but also a symbol of social recognition (see I01; I;02; I03; I05),

acceptance, or, conversely, feelings of distance and exclusion. Similarly, social participation was associated not only with inclusion in areas such as education, employment, and broader social life, but also with the opportunity to build meaningful relationships, feel accepted, and develop a sense of security and the possibility of existing without fear in everyday life (see I06).

Based on these findings, it can be observed that integration among participants was not presented as a linear process necessarily leading toward identification with the majority society or the gradual adoption of predefined norms and behavioral patterns. Rather, the interviews point toward a dynamic and relational process through which individuals continuously negotiate and reassess their own social positions, boundaries of acceptance, and different forms of belonging (see I07). In this way, the findings partially challenge the assumption that integration represents a one-directional process of adaptation in which migrants gradually adopt dominant social norms and patterns. Instead, the participants' experiences suggest that a sense of belonging may develop through different social spaces and relationships that do not necessarily have to be connected exclusively to national, cultural, or institutional frameworks.(see I07; I02)

It is particularly significant that participants frequently demonstrated a high degree of reflexivity in the ways they understood and interpreted their own experiences of migration and integration during the interviews. Rather than passively accepting social expectations, participants often critically reflected on how society defines "successful integration" and on their own position within such expectations (see I03; I04; I07). Their narratives indicate that they were simultaneously aware of the social norms imposed upon them while actively developing their own interpretations of these norms. Such findings suggest that migrants should not be understood merely as objects of integration policies and social expectations, but also as active agents who produce meanings and develop their own strategies for understanding social reality through everyday experiences.

Within this context, digital technologies and the content emerging within digital spaces played a particularly important role. Although digital platforms were associated by some participants with experiences of negative representations of migrants, stereotypes, and content reproducing processes of othering, they simultaneously represented spaces in which participants could critically reflect upon and reinterpret such content. Particularly interesting was the finding that content characteristic of the everyday digital practices of Generation Z, such as short-form videos, satirical content, internet humor, and memes, often represented far more than simple forms of entertainment (see I04; I07). Through humor, irony, and sarcasm, participants frequently recognized and articulated broader social processes shaping their everyday experiences.

Based on these findings, it can be assumed that digital content does not function solely as a space of passive information consumption but also as a space for reflection and social awareness. For some participants, such content contributed to recognizing and understanding structural characteristics of social relations, including unequal power relations, stereotypes, and processes of exclusion that often remain less visible in everyday interactions. In this sense, digital content

may contribute to the development of critical awareness regarding social processes shaping experiences of migration and belonging. (see I04; I07; I02)

Viewed as a whole, the findings of this study indicate the need for approaches that move beyond exclusively structural indicators of integration and incorporate subjective, affective, and reflexive dimensions of migrant experiences. This implies understanding migrants not as individuals adapting to existing social structures, but also as active subjects who, through everyday interactions, digital practices, and personal interpretations, actively participate in shaping their own sense of belonging and the meanings attached to integration.

Such a perspective may be particularly important for future research on migration and integration within digital societies, as it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which contemporary migrants experience, negotiate, and construct their place within social relations. Furthermore, the findings suggest that digital environments should not be understood solely as technical tools or communication infrastructures, but also as social spaces in which identities, relationships, and experiences of belonging are continuously interpreted and negotiated. For members of Generation Z in particular, digital content and practices appear to contribute not only to social participation but also to greater awareness of the structural dimensions of migration-related experiences, thereby opening spaces for critical reflection on social expectations, power relations, and the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

7 Literature

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Annexes

Annex I – Interview overview

Participant Name	Abbreviation	Date of Interview	Interview Duration	Place of Interview
Dunja	I1	10.04.2026	10:26	Café
Hasan	I2	05.04.2026	24:39	Office
Helena	I3	01.04.2026	13:07	Google Meet
Hrvoje	I4	01.04.2026	34:41	Google Meet
Mia	I5	02.04.2026	29:32	Google Meet
Ivan	I6	04.04.2026	29:35	Google Meet
Jovan	I7	05.04.2026	25:02	Google Meet
Marija	I8	05.04.2026	25:51	Google Meet

Anex II – Interview Questions

1. Introduction and Biographical Context

- a. Could you briefly introduce yourself and tell me where you come from and how long you have been living in Vienna?
- b. What does your everyday life in Vienna look like?
- c. How would you describe your German language skills?
- d. How would you describe your social life in Vienna? Do you have a circle of people you regularly spend time with?
- e. To what extent do you feel familiar with life in Austria?

3. Belonging, Integration and Experiences

- a. When you hear the term “integration,” what does it personally mean to you?
- b. How would you describe your personal “sense of belonging” in Vienna? Do you feel like you are part of society here? Has this changed over time?
- c. In which situations do you feel most like you are part of society here?
- d. Can you recall a situation in which you felt that you did not belong or felt like an outsider?
- e. What role do digital technologies play in your everyday life and in how you experience your sense of belonging here?

2. Digital Practices

- a. Which digital platforms or technologies do you use most frequently in your everyday life? What do you mainly use them for?
- b. Do you follow content related to Vienna or Austria? If so, what kind of content?
- c. How do you experience or perceive such content about Vienna? Does it in any way contribute to your feeling of being part of society here?
- d. Which digital applications or tools help you in your everyday life in Vienna, and in what ways do you use them? Do you use them, for example, for navigating the city, organizing daily activities, communication with others, or even for job searching?

Anex III – Interview transcription

Intererview 1; I01

Datum 10.4.2026

Time: 17:30

Place: Caffè

Intererview: :) Tako je. Okej. Zdravo Dunja, da bih mogla da vam se predstaviš da kažeš koliko imaš godina i kada si došla u Beč, čime se baviš i tako neke opšte informacije, da nam kažeš.

Dunja: Zdravo, ja sam Dunja Gavrilović. Imam 24 godine, napuniću sada 25. Dolazim iz Beograda. Moj prvi dolazak u Austriju je zapravo bio u Linca, ne u Beč, za početak mojih... ja studiram violončelo koncert fah, znači performans muziku. I da, sada sam na masteru, i ovde sam već... pa, peta, zapravo sad mi je šesto godine.

Intererview: Je l' bi mogla nešto da nam kažeš recimo o terminu integracija, kada čuješ reč integracija, šta za tebe to podrazumeva?

Dunja: Pa za mene je to podrazumeva dolazak u neku drugu kulturu i da kažem spremnost da prepoznamo razlike te kulture, neka osvešćenost o tome i o razlikama zapravo između naše kulture i nečega kako smo mi odrasli, i kulture ljudi koji ovde žive i koji su ovde rođeni, i da kažem neka vrsta poštovanja prema toj razlici. I pokušaj je... pokušaj življenja, što je više moguće na način kao što je ta kultura gde smo došli. I naravno mislim, ukoliko je drugačiji jezik, učenje tog jezika, razumevanje socijalnih odnosa, emotivnih odnosa između ljudi, i prosto poštovanje nekih pravila koje... i imanja razumevanja za razlike između nas i te druge kulture.

Intererview: Ok. A kaži mi, je l' bi ti sad rekla da si integrisana? Šta za tebe znači onda biti integrisana?

Dunja: Mislim da sam veoma integrisana zato što sam naučila uglavnom naučila sam većinu pravila, naučila sam jezik na jako visokom nivou. Imam dosta prijatelja Austrijaca, pa i Nemaca, mislim sa nemačkog govornog područja. Razumem svoju autentičnost i razumem odakle ja dolazim i to ne želim da menjam. Ali sa druge strane osetila sam jak, da kažem sad na engleskom, influenser njihove kulture, jer sam došla sa 19 godina i mislim da me je jako oblikovala ovu osobu kako sam danas. I prepoznajem velike razlike sa 19 godina i sada sa 25.

Intererview: A možeš nešto da nam kažeš recimo o tome kada si došla tek u Austriju i kakvi su ti bili prvi utisci pre nego što si došla na ovaj stadion kao što sad kažeš da se osećaš da pripadaš ovde? Kakvi su bili počeci, je l' bilo neke stvari koje su ti smetale na početku? Je l' možeš da se prisetiš tog vremena?

Dunja: Pa kada sam došla, dosta sam se družila sa internacionalnim studentima, koristila sam engleski dosta, ali sam imala jaku potrebu da naučim jezik. Imala sam mentora, to jest mog profesora čela koji mi je pomogao da to uradim. I sa njim sam stalno pričala na nemačkom i on je i dan danas na neki način kao moj deka, on je kao član moje porodice i onda sam se osetila bukvalno prisvojeno od strane nekog ko je pravi Austrijanac. Tako da mi je to zaista pomoglo, ali da, prvih par godina je definitivno bilo uglavnom moje internacionalno društvo bez Austrijanaca, ali sam se ja uvek trudila da naučim jezik i onda kada sam bila sigurna da sam ga savladala, onda sam se nekako uključila i u njihovo društvo i onda se sad osećam jako prihvaćeno zapravo gde god da odem jer znam da vladam jezikom.

Dunja: Jer zapravo mislim da je to jedna, ako ne i glavna najvažnija stvar apsolutno jer kada vladaš jezikom na jako visokom nivou, to jest na veoma visokom nivou, onda su ti većina vrata otvorena i osećam da oni imaju veliki respekt prema ljudima koji mogu da nauče jezik na tako visokom nivou.

Intererview: A kaži mi, je l' postojala neka situacija, od kad boraviš ovde, znači od početka pa do sada, gde si osetila neku vrstu, na engleskom bi rekli, othering, neka vrsta diskriminacije, bila to u magistratu ili neki događaj? Možeš da se setiš bilo čega da si pomislila kao da... ne mora da bude diskriminacija, ali da si nekad osetila taj othering?

Dunja: Pa na primer u magistratu nisam imala mnogo problema. Jednom je viza kasnila jako puno i morala sam da ih smaram zašto, ali na kraju je ispao problem zapravo da su samo zaboravili moj slučaj iako su se fino izvinili i poslali mi baš email izvinjenja zbog toga jer su rekli

da je bilo slučajno. Osetila sam često neprijatnosti na primer kada sedim sa drugarima i pričamo na srpskom, i ako je na primer u gornjoj Austriji, ili nekim manjim mestima, mi glasni, često se osetiš neprijatno, ili neki ljudi su dolazili, vikali su na mene jer sam pričala na srpskom, pa čak i na engleskom, zapravo mi se dosta dešavalo, ne samo na srpskom. Da, tako da tu sam nekako osetila te neprijatnosti.

Interview: Je l' možeš da nam kažeš recimo da li si na društvenim mrežama, šta koristiš od društvenih mreža? Da li ako si na njima pratiš neki content ili sadržaj koji je u vezi sa Bečom, Austrijom i tako dalje?

Dunja: Pa uglavnom pratim sve njihove orkestre i filharmonije i pratim par influensera, to jest više influenserki koje su mislim Nemice ili Austrijanke.

Interview: Šta si dobila od tih influensera? Kako je osećaj to kad pratiš? Koje znanje dobiješ?

Dunja: Zanimljivo mi je bilo da prosto slušam nešto na nemačkom, a ne samo na engleskom. Pošto srpske na primer influenserke ne pratim nikada. Da, prosto nekako to. I naravno ako sam ovde onda znam i šta, ako treba neki proizvod da kupim ili nešto tako, bilo mi je lakše da znam šta ima ovde nego šta ima na marketu, ne znam, u Americi, lupam. I naravno ne samo u modi ili lepoti već ne znam, u fitnessu i tako drugim stvarima. Politiku ne pratim toliko, da kažem ovo što ima veze sa mnom, sa muzikom naravno pratim jako puno šta se dešava u harmoniji, u simfonijama u Insbrodu, Lincu, Gracu i Klagenfurtu i svim većim orkestrima. Oni često imaju i preskonferencije i tako dalje, tako da te stvari pratim.

Interview: Šta misliš, koliko ili da li društvene mreže, socijalni mediji utiču na neki osećaj pripadnosti ovoj okolini? Da li te približavaju ili udaljavaju od nje? Da li si nekad doživela neki osećaj diskriminacije online?

Dunja: Mislim da je to jako retko zato što mediji ovde, hajde kad govorim iz perspektive za nas Srbe, mislim da prepoznaju tu veliku zajednicu ovde, pre svega u Beču, a samim tim i u celoj Austriji. Mislim da je takva diskriminacija veoma, veoma potisnuta i da je bukvalno nema jer je nemoguće. Šta ljudi pišu u komentarima, to je neka druga stvar, to su lična mišljenja zasebnih ljudi. Da, u tom smislu nisam. Kao što kažem, sve je prosto jako ograničeno.

Interview: Koliko sad, ako da zaključimo i završimo, socijalne mreže mogu da pomognu da imaš neki osećaj belonginga?

Dunja: Mislim da mogu i da ne mogu. Mislim zato što je sve do perspektive i toga koliko je neka osoba otvorena. Zapravo osetim da mnogo ljudi nisu otvoreni za integraciju, tj. žele jako da ostanu ono što jesu, jer naravno to treba uvek ostati, ali odbijaju da prihvate neke druge ljude, odbijaju da nauče njihov način, da uđu u drugu perspektivu, da se stave u njihove cipele i oni odbijaju. Tako da ja mislim da je to u svakom slučaju samo 100% lična odluka osobe da li želiš ili ne želiš. Jer neko može da nauči, neko ne može. Mislim ima dosta ljudi koji su naučili jezik, ali toliko ne žele da imaju nikakve veze sa ovom drugom kulturom. Ima ljudi koji odbijaju da nauče jezik, znam dosta ljudi na različitim spektrima. To je stvarno lična odluka. Svi ovde pričaju engleski, iako ne pričaju srpski. Mislim da je stvarno koliko neko uloži truda sam.

Interview: Ništa. Hvala Dunji na ovom razgovoru.

Interview 2; I02

Datum 5.4.2026

Time: 19:30

Place: Office

Interviewer: So, hallo, Hasan.

Hasan: Hallo.

Interviewer: Ja. Also, ja. Ich habe paar Fragen für dich, ja.

Interviewer: So, kannst Du zuerst sagen, wie heißt Du? Wie alt bist Du? Und wann hast Du in Wien, wann bist Du in Wien gekommen, ja?

Hasan: Ich bin Tahasan. Ja. Ich bin 26 Jahre alt. Ich bin 2015 nach Österreich geflüchtet. Ja. Und ich bin seit 2017 in Wien.

Interviewer: Mhm. Und wie sieht deine Alltag in Wien aus? So, was machst Du so beruflich?

Hasan: Ich habe zwei Jobs. Ja, ich arbeite als Betreuer.

Interviewer: Aha, cool. Ja. Okay. Und wie würdest Du dein Deutsch beschreiben? So wie war dein Deutsch am Anfang? Wie ist dein Deutsch jetzt? Und hattest Du Probleme mit der Sprache am Anfang? So, wie hast Du dich gefühlt wegen der Sprache? War es schwierig oder nicht schwierig?

Hasan: Die Sprache ist schon schwer genug. Bis jetzt kann ich nicht so gut, ja. Weil Integration hab ich nicht so ganz. Aber ich hab schon Deutsch gelernt. Ich bin in die Schule gegangen. Ich hab hier Deutsch gelernt. Deutschkurs hab ich über YouTube gelernt.

Interviewer: Ah, okay, okay. Aber wie würdest Du diese Zeit beschreiben, wenn Du gar kein Deutsch reden konntest?

Hasan: Gar kein Deutsch, ja. Ja, es war schwer am Anfang. Ich hab nur Englisch gesprochen, weil Deutsch war für mich schwer und ich habe die Sprache noch nicht gelernt und so. Aber mit der Zeit jetzt schon. Ich bin jetzt schon das zwölfte Jahr da. Man gewöhnt sich langsam in der Arbeit, zu Hause, Freizeit und so.

Interviewer: Also wie würdest Du dann dein soziales Leben in Wien beschreiben? Hast Du Freunde hier und so? Wie verbringst Du deine regelmäßige Zeit?

Hasan: In meiner Freizeit koche ich gerne. Ich bin bei einem Verein.

Interviewer: Welcher Verein?

Hasan: Klub Ensemble.

Interviewer: Okay, was ist das? Kannst Du uns sagen?

Hasan: Klub Ensemble ist so geplant für Migranten. Und das unterstützt Migranten. Zum Beispiel wir haben eine Werkstatt, wir haben Kochprojekt, wir haben Straßenfest und so. Und wir unterstützen die.

Interviewer: Okay, okay.

Hasan: Ja, zum Beispiel ich koche gerne. Und ich bin dort meistens als Koch.

Interviewer: Also ihr helft Migranten dort?

Hasan: Ja, ja. Wir helfen Migranten, diese Frauen, ja. Alle geflüchtet meistens. Und sie können nicht gut Deutsch, damit sie mit denen reden die ganze Zeit, damit sie Deutsch lernen.

Interviewer: Sodass Du übersetzt?

Hasan: Ich übersetze nicht, aber ich mache nur mit. Das ist von einem besten Freund von mir, ehemaliger Arbeitskollege eigentlich. Und wir treffen uns meistens dort im Verein. Verschiedene Flüchtlinge aus verschiedenen Ländern, ja.

Interviewer: Welche Sprache redet ihr dort?

Hasan: Wir versuchen langsamer Deutsch mit denen zu reden.

Interviewer: Also miteinander, ja?

Hasan: Ja. Aber meistens helfe ich, weil ich besser Deutsch kann.

Interviewer: Aha, okay. Und dort verbringst Du deine Freizeit?

Hasan: Ja. Und ich habe auch eigene private Freunde, die sind aus der Heimat. Da gehe ich mit denen spazieren, Eis essen und so.

Interviewer: Die sind alle schon lange hier, oder?

Hasan: Ja, eigentlich seit 2018 hier.

Interviewer: Okay. Also ich frage dich jetzt über den Begriff Integration. Was ist deine erste Meinung, wenn Du „Integration“ hörst? Was bedeutet Integration für dich?

Hasan: Integration ist sehr schwer zu beschreiben.

Interviewer: Okay.

Hasan: Weil am Anfang hatte ich immer Probleme mit dem Integrieren.

Interviewer: Wie meinst Du das? Was war das Problem?

Hasan: Die Sprache war Problem. Und meistens die Lehrer in den Integrationskursen – sie wollten nur, dass der Tag vorbei geht.

Interviewer: Was wollten sie?

Hasan: Dass der Tag fertig ist. Damit alles schnell schnell schnell vorbei geht.

Interviewer: Aha.

Hasan: Aber ich habe am meisten Integration in der Arbeit gedacht.

Interviewer: Aha, aha. Also das heißt, es war schwer für dich, weil diese Professoren oder Professorinnen nicht so viel Zeit für euch hatten?

Hasan: Ja.

Interviewer: Würdest Du sagen, dass Du Zugehörigkeit zu Wien fühlst? Wie kannst Du das beschreiben? Fühlst Du dich schon gewohnt hier?

Hasan: Ja, ich habe mich schon gewohnt.

Interviewer: Hast Du irgendwelche Beispiele, wo Du diskriminiert wurdest?

Hasan: Ich wurde oft diskriminiert, weil ich schwarze Haare habe und sie sagen, ich gehöre nicht hierher.

Interviewer: Kannst Du uns ein oder zwei Beispiele geben?

Hasan: Einmal war ich in der U-Bahn und eine Frau sagte zu mir: „Du gehörst nicht hierher. Geh zurück in dein Land. Das hier ist unser Land.“ Ich habe es ignoriert.

Interviewer: Ja?

Hasan: Ja, weil ich gelernt habe zu ignorieren. Ich habe auch einen Diskriminierungskurs gemacht. Alte Leute sagen manchmal blöde Worte oder schimpfen und so.

Interviewer: Und sonst?

Hasan: Einmal saß ich auch in der U-Bahn und eine Dame sagte zu mir, Flüchtlinge gehören nicht zum Sitzen, sondern zum Stehen.

Interviewer: Wie hast Du reagiert?

Hasan: Ich habe sie einfach ignoriert und bin weitergegangen. Wenn ich diskutiere, werde ich auch bisschen böse.

Interviewer: Also alltägliche Beispiele von Diskriminierung. Aber was ist deine Erfahrung mit zum Beispiel MA35 und solchen bürokratischen Dingen?

Hasan: Die sind bisschen schlecht für mich.

Interviewer: Was ist passiert?

Hasan: Ich wollte Staatsbürgerschaft beantragen. Ich wollte Dokumente abgeben. Es gibt ein System: Wenn Du zehn Jahre in Österreich bist und Daueraufenthalt EU hast und im sozialen Bereich arbeitest oder freiwillig tätig bist, dann kannst Du mit B1 beantragen. Aber die Frau von MA35 wollte meine Freiwilligkeit der letzten drei Jahre nicht nehmen. Und sie wollte auch meine Bestätigung vom sozialen Bereich nicht nehmen. Und ich habe eine Ablehnung bekommen.

Interviewer: Wegen dem Sprachlevel?

Hasan: Ja, weil ich kein B2 habe.

Interviewer: Okay.

Hasan: Wenn Du wechselst von subsidiärem Schutz auf Daueraufenthalt EU, musst Du B2 haben. Du musst noch fünf Jahre warten.

Interviewer: Und wie hast Du dich dabei gefühlt?

Hasan: Ich war urschockiert. Ich arbeite seit vier Jahren im sozialen Bereich und freiwillig. Warum hat sie das nicht genommen? Ich habe keine Beschwerde gemacht, weil sie mir Angst gemacht hat. Sie hat gesagt, wenn ich Beschwerde mache, kann es sein, dass die Gerichtskosten auf mich fallen. Ich hatte Angst, noch mehr zahlen zu müssen. Bei der Ablehnung musste ich schon 150 Euro zahlen.

Interviewer: Welche Aufenthaltskarte hast Du jetzt?

Hasan: Daueraufenthalt EU.

Interviewer: Und kannst Du mit diesem Status wählen?

Hasan: Nein, wählen kann man nur mit Staatsbürgerschaft.

Interviewer: Wie war dein Gefühl danach?

Hasan: Es ging mir schlecht. Aber ich habe gesagt, irgendwann wird es klappen. Ich kann nicht die ganze Zeit traurig sein. Der Tag muss weitergehen.

Interviewer: Benutzt Du oft Internet oder soziale Netzwerke? Instagram, TikTok, YouTube?

Hasan: Instagram, TikTok, YouTube und Facebook verwende ich am meisten.

Interviewer: Folgst Du irgendwelchen Inhalten über österreichische Kultur oder Wien?

Hasan: Ja, über Politik folge ich Zeit im Bild. Ich höre Nachrichten über alles, was heutzutage passiert. Und ich höre Radio Wien in der Früh.

Interviewer: Und auf TikTok?

Hasan: Auf TikTok gibt es lustige Sachen. Eine Show von jungen Leuten, die Witze machen. Auf Deutsch.

Interviewer: Verstehst Du das alles?

Hasan: Ja, meistens schon. Wenn ich ein Wort nicht weiß, dann übersetze ich es.

Interviewer: Noch etwas?

Hasan: Es gibt auch arabische Gruppen in Österreich, denen ich folge.

Interviewer: Und diese Witze – worum geht es da?

Hasan: Ich kann dir ein kurzes Video zeigen.

Interviewer: Wenn Du vergleichst, was dir in der U-Bahn passiert ist, und diese Inhalte online – wie würdest Du das erklären?

Hasan: Das sind viele Unterschiede. Hier online fühle ich mich wohl, weil er fragt mich ob das für mich passt. Aber in der U-Bahn fühle ich mich nicht wohl. Wenn ich solche Sachen höre, frage ich mich manchmal: Gehöre ich in dieses Land oder nicht?

Interviewer: Und wie beeinflussen diese Inhalte dein Gefühl?

Hasan: Es nimmt mir ein bisschen diese schlechten Gedanken wegen Diskriminierung weg.

Interviewer: Welche Rolle spielen digitale Technologien in deinem Alltag? In Bezug auf belonging oder Integration?

Hasan: Man lernt, wie andere Leute sind, wie man mit anderen Menschen umgeht und spricht. Eigentlich sollte man Integration in den Kursen lernen, aber ich habe das dort nicht gelernt, weil es nicht gut war. Meistens habe ich in der Arbeit gelernt.

Interviewer: Warum waren die Kurse nicht gut?

Hasan: Wegen der Lehrer. Der Kurs war drei Tage. In diesen drei Tagen hatten wir alle vierzig Minuten Pause. Eigentlich sollten die Pausen fünf Minuten sein, aber sie waren eine halbe Stunde. Dann Mittagspause eine Stunde, aber sie dauerte eineinhalb Stunden. Der Tag war schnell vorbei.

Interviewer: Und im Vergleich dazu helfen dir YouTube oder TikTok?

Hasan: Ja, weil ich viel höre und dadurch integriere ich mich. Wenn ich sehe, wie etwas passiert, lerne ich aus Fehlern. Man lernt daraus. Technologie ist heutzutage wichtig. Ich höre auch von anderen Leuten, wie ich umgehen soll.

Interviewer: Und die letzte Frage: Fühlst Du dich jetzt zugehörig hier oder nicht?

Hasan: In letzter Zeit nicht so. Nach der Ablehnung der Staatsbürgerschaft und all diesen Papieren. Ich hasse das, weil alles so lange dauert.

Interviewer: Gibt es auch eine andere Seite oder nur diese Erfahrungen?

Hasan: Uns hilft eigentlich nur das. Behörden machen Kopfschmerzen. Du musst warten und warten.

Interviewer: Okay. Danke dir.

Hasan: Bitte.

Interview 3; I03

Datum 1.4.2026

Time: 19:30

Place: Google Meets

Interviewer: Mögest Du kurz Helena da nam se predstavish, odakle dolazish i koliko dugo zivish u Beču?

Helena: Hej, ja sam Helena Bulica, imam 22 godine, dolazim iz zajednice Bosne i Hercegovine, zivim trenutno u Beču prošle 3 godine.

Interviewer: I možeš recimo da nam kažeš ukratko kako bi opisala tvoj život u Beču, čime se baviš, šta radiš i tako dalje.

Helena: Pa prvenstveno ja sam student u Beču, studiram na Pop-up Schule, što je malo drugačiji sistem, pa mi oduzima puno vremena. Smatram da je život u Beču sasvim ok.

Interviewer: A šta ti se najviše sviđa tu? Šta bi rekla, šta bi izdvojila?

Helena: U Beču mi se najviše sviđa to što se može pronaći nešto za svakog. Što ima puno različitih nacija, pa se pronađeš i ti u nekoj. Što je bolje nego srednji obrazovni sistem.

Interviewer: A kaži mi, kako stojiš sa nemačkim? Kako ti je bilo da savladaš jezik? Jesi li imala neke prepreke?

Helena: Nemački je bio vrlo komplikovan za savladati, s obzirom da su tražili jedan specifičan ispit i nije bio nijedan drugi osim jednog. Tako da procedura da se sam jezik položi bila je veoma komplikovana i veoma teška. Pogotovo dobiti mjesto za ispit i konstantna

plaćanja za kurseve i sve. Pogotovo mi koji dolazimo izvana moramo da plaćamo puno više za kurseve. Preko 1000 EUR za jedan semestar. Studentski sam i smatram da je to previše. Međutim, nakon godinu dana više sam učila sama nego na kursevima i položila sam cijeli nivo.

Interviewer: Kako si se osjećala povodom svega toga?

Helena: Bila sam pod ogromnim pritiskom. Bila sam potpuno iscrpljena svaki put kad sam izašla na ispit i pala. Mislila sam da mi je tu kraj. Da više ne mogu ispraviti život. To je učenje, mogu slobodno reći, bilo strašno.

Interviewer: Kako bi opisala svoj društveni život u Beču? Prijatelje sa kojima se viđaš i kako provodiš slobodno vrijeme?

Helena: Teško je naći prave prijatelje, tamo je teško naći uopšte prijatelje, s obzirom da su svi već raspodijeljeni u nekim grupicama. No međutim, mi se nađemo u svojim grupicama. Na primjer, dosta mojih prijatelja je većinski sa teritorije bivše Jugoslavije. Imam naravno par prijatelja koji su Austrijanci, ali to je isključivo profesionalno, kao kolege na konferencijama. Tako da smatram da je društveni život dosta teži.

Interviewer: A na kom jeziku pričaš sa tim kolegama? Na nemačkom, engleskom?

Helena: Na njemačkom.

Interviewer: Možemo li reći da si upoznata sa životom u Austriji za sve ovo vrijeme? Osjećáš li se prijatno?

Helena: Da, u nekim momentima se osjećam prijatno, u nekim malo nelagodno. Pogotovo kad pričam na svom jeziku i onda se to čuje i primijeti. Dobije se par ružnih pogleda, par ružnih komentara. No međutim, ako želimo da se izborimo za naše volje, moramo to i dobiti.

Interviewer: Kada kažem integracija, šta ti prvo pomisliš? Šta je za tebe integracija?

Helena: Integracija je pokušaj da pripadamo određenoj grupi ljudi koja je većinska u jednoj zemlji.

Interviewer: A da li je to samo vezano za ljude ili i za nešto drugo? Kako bi opisala pripadnost?

Helena: Pripadnost je da budemo dio kulture, jezika, jednostavno da se nekako kamufliramo u Austrijance.

Interviewer: Jesi li imala neke situacije kada si se osjećala isključeno ili diskriminirano?

Helena: Bilo je situacija, posebno kada sam se tek doselila u Beč, kada nisam mogla da se sporazumijevam na njemačkom jeziku. Naprimjer, kada odeš u kafić, naručiš kafu i ne kažeš ispravno ili izgubiš se u rečenici, pogledaju te ružno ili dodaju neki ružan komentar. U većini slučajeva misle da ih ne razumiješ.

Interviewer: Prelazimo sada na pitanja vezana za digitalne tehnologije i društvene mreže. Šta koristiš od društvenih mreža?

Helena: Aktivno koristim Instagram i YouTube, a povremeno uđem na Facebook.

Interviewer: Imaš li neke sadržaje na nemačkom koje pratiš, vezane za kulturu ili život u Beču?

Helena: Mislim da je klasika možda ORF, koji često izbacuje političke vijesti i šta se dešava u Austriji.

Interviewer: Šta pratiš na ORF-u?

Helena: Klasične austrijske stranice koje govore novosti u politici. Međutim, imamo dosta i reklama i kontenta koji pokazuje situaciju u Austriji, koliko ljudi žive u Austriji a ne pričaju njemački jezik, koliko djece ima problema u školama zato što kod kuće pričaju na svom jeziku. Pretežno se sve vrti oko toga – neznanja njemačkog jezika ili neuspjevanja da se dobro integrišu.

Interviewer: Kako se osjećáš kada čuješ te vijesti?

Helena: Osjećam se nelagodno, s obzirom da sam i ja u toj skupini. Iako smatram da sam se dobro snašla, svaki put kada to vidim osjećam se izbačeno, nekako odbačeno od određenih grupa ljudi. Pitam se da li je to država za mene i da li sam donijela dobru odluku kada sam došla ovdje. Jednostavno osjećaj odbačenosti.

Interviewer: Je li ORF jedini sadržaj koji pratiš ili postoji još nešto na Instagramu, neki memovi ili slični sadržaji?

Helena: Konstantno mi izlaze meme stranice koje su mi čak i najdraže. Često na tim meme stranicama dobijem videe od Austrijanaca ili Nijemaca koji su i nama veoma smiješni.

Većinom imaju i subtitlove, pa malo učimo njihov slang. Tako da nije sve samo crno i bijelo. Ima zanimljivih i šaljivih stvari. Uvijek se osjećam sretno i nasmijem se kad vidim takav kontent.

Interviewer: Kada uporediš stvarnost i neprijatne situacije koje si opisala sa onim što vidiš online, možeš li napraviti neku paralelu između realnog života i digitalnog svijeta?

Helena: Smatram da nelagodnih situacija i nelagodnih komentara ima svugdje, ne samo u Austriji. Socijalne mreže nam prikazuju i dio realnosti i dio fantazije.

Interviewer: Mhm.

Helena: Što se tiče socijalnih mreža i ozbiljnih i šaljivih sadržaja, svaki put kad vidimo ove ozbiljne, malo se osjećamo nelagodno. No međutim onda dođu šaljivi sadržaji, mimovi i videi koji ismijavaju i nas i same sebe. Tu opet osjećamo pripadnost zato što smo svi u istoj grupi, za sve se vežemo i to mi olakšava život u Austriji. Uvijek se nasmijem kad vidim tako nešto i vidim da nije sve tako crno i ozbiljno. Jednostavno je to proces kroz koji se mora proći, a takve stvari nam iskreno olakšavaju život, pogotovo mladima koji su došli u takvu državu.

Interviewer: To je to. Imaš li možda nešto za kraj ili nešto da pitaš?

Helena: Šta se trebam pitati?

Interviewer: Ništa, samo se tako kaže na kraju. Ok, zaustavljamo snimanje, to je to.

Intererview 4; I04

Datum 1.4.2026

Time: 20:30

Place: Google Meets

Interviewer: Hvala ti što učestvuješ u ovom malom istraživanju. Bićeš mi od velike pomoći za konačnu analizu mojih podataka za master rad. Da ne širimo dalje priču, prvo bih te pitao neke osnovne stvari: da nam se predstaviš, kažeš kada si došao u Beč, koliko dugo živiš u Beču i čime se baviš.

Hrvoje: Ok. Ime mi je Hrvoje Vojca, rođen sam u Zenici 1996. Došao sam za Beč krajem 2015, znači početkom 2016. I ja sam tu u Beču do sada, koliko je to, ima već 11–12 godina. Došao sam da studiram, ali u međuvremenu se to malo zakomplovalo, pa sam onda tražio posao i trenutno radim puno radno vrijeme već 5–6 godina u jednoj firmi. Došao sam s hrvatskim pasošem, tako da nisam imao nekih problema što se toga tiče, mislim, to mi je jako puno pomoglo. Makar oko toga se nisam morao brinuti. To je manje-više osnovno.

Interviewer: A oko čega si se brinuo? Ako kažeš da se oko toga nisi brinuo, oko čega si se brinuo? Recimo na fakultetu i u svakodnevnom životu, kako bi opisao to? Šta te brinulo, šta te mučilo?

Hrvoje: Početak je težak, a meni je pogotovo teško pao jer sa 18–19 godina čitav život imaš neke stvari za koje se nisi brinuo i odjednom moraš sve preuzeti na sebe. Plus ideš u drugu zemlju, sa drugom kulturom, drugim jezikom. Bio sam izgubljen i nisam znao ni kako se posao traži. Što se tiče čitavog životnog dijela kao odrasla osoba, na primjer doktor, kako funkcionise osiguranje, kako funkcionišu bankovni računi, sve te sitnice koje su meni tada bile jako teške za shvatiti i razumjeti jer nisam imao od koga. Kada sve to prođe, onda je to manje-više gotova stvar i ide lako, ali kad dođeš u novu situaciju bez ikakvog iskustva, naravno da je strašno. Nakon toga je krenuo fakultet, pa sam ovdje otišao u dom i onda sam se i tu morao brinuti da živim po nekom njihovom standardu.

Interviewer: A šta znači njihov standard? Kada kažeš kultura i to, šta za tebe to predstavlja?

Hrvoje: Tada mi je to predstavljalo da, kratko rečeno, posmatram njih i pokušavam da radim to što i oni rade.

Interviewer: Na koga misliš?

Hrvoje: Na Austrijance, manje-više. Na rođene Austrijance ili na ljude koji su ovdje duže vremena, ili naše ljude koji su ovdje rođeni. Uglavnom na ljude koji su već imali kontakt sa tom kulturom.

Interviewer: A kako si se ti osjećao povodom toga?

Hrvoje: Dugo godina sam se osjećao izgubljeno i uplašeno. Nisam se baš nešto čuo, više sam gledao da budem nezapažen i u pozadini.

Interviewer: A zašto nezapažen? Imaš li strah od nečega?

Hrvoje: Ne znam kako najbolje da uporedim, ali mene je to podsjetilo na strah kao kad ideš prvi dan u školu ili obdanište. Bukvalno kao malo dijete, izgubljeno. Najviše ti se plače, ne znaš šta ćeš, ništa nije tvoje, nisi na svom terenu, nemaš s kim da se družiš, nema ono: "Hajde, hoćemo na kafu, hoćemo van, hoćemo na basket." To su te neke stvari na koje sam navikao u Zenici. Odjednom više nisi mogao tako direktno. Jedina druženja su bila na faksu i onda ponovo na faksu. To je uglavnom bilo oko predmeta. Tu i tamo se naravno izađe s društvom, ali se više vrtjelo oko skupine, a ne oko pojedinca. Meni je trebalo nešto da imam svoje ljude koji mene znaju i koje ja znam.

Interviewer: A kako bi danas opisao svoj društveni život? S kim se družiš, s kim provodiš vrijeme, kako ti je na poslu? U kojoj mjeri bi rekao da se danas osjećaš upoznat sa životom ovdje? I možeš možda reći nešto o jeziku, kako bi opisao svoje znanje jezika i kako se osjećaš povodom toga?

Hrvoje: Što se tiče jezika, nisam baš najzadovoljniji, iskreno da kažem. Nakon 11 godina i dalje ima dana kada pričam njemački kao da sam ga tek krenuo učiti, a ima dana kada sam sebe čujem i zvuči mi tečno. Ali to zavisi od dana. Ja sam u Zenici imao njemački od petog razreda, i onda u gimnaziji. Pored toga sam išao na kurs njemačkog prije nego što sam došao u Beč i radio sam OSD certifikat. Tada je trebalo B2, sada već traže C1 i posebne kategorije, tako da nije više lako kao što je tada bilo. Dok sam radio te testove, mislio sam da poznajem jezik, a onda sam došao ovdje i shvatio da njemački nije njemački. Svako ga izvrće na svoj način. Ako ideš malo prema Niederösterreichu, oni pričaju ovako, ovi pričaju onako. I dan-danas, iskreno, nije mi drago pričati njemački. Pričam ga jer ga moram pričati, ne zato što hoću. Primjetim da mi uzima puno mentalne snage.

Interviewer: A ko te tjera da pričaš?

Hrvoje: Pričam ga kada moram. Kad sam na poslu, većina kolega su Austrijanci i s njima naravno pričam njemački. Ali kada smo na pauzi i ima naših ex-Yu ljudi, onda pričam naš jezik i tu se osjećam slobodnije. Ne samo što se tiče gramatike i tačnosti, nego uopšte tema koje možeš pokrenuti. Jer kako god znao ili ne znao jezik, ne razumiješ uvijek kulturno šta je prihvatljivo, a šta nije. Ja sam osoba koja uživa da se zeza, ali humor ovdje je teško kopirati jer nisi upoznat s njim. Nekad se oni smiju nekim stvarima, a s druge strane ne možeš prevesti stvari koje su sa naših prostora – prvo jezično, a drugo po smislu.

Interviewer: Da li bi rekao da ti je jezik bio opterećujuća stvar?

Hrvoje: I dalje jeste.

Interviewer: Kada čuješ pojam integracija, šta za tebe znači integracija kao termin?

Hrvoje: Jednostavno, kratko rečeno: došao si na tuđi teren, ponašaj se po pravilima tog terena. To se može dalje razgledati. Koliko ja znam, imaš dvije vrste integracije: ima prisiljena i ima dobrovoljna. Dobrovoljna je, na primjer, kada ljudi preferiraju ovaj način kulture, života, rada i tako dalje, u poređenju sa načinom života dole.

Interviewer: Kada kažeš prisiljena, ko prisiljava? Gdje se to može osjetiti? Ko vrši tu prisilu?

Hrvoje: To je pola-pola. Ne mogu tačno reći da te neko direktno prisiljava. Upoznaš svakakve ljude. Ima Austrijanaca koji su opušteni i nisu toliko takvi.

Interviewer: Znači, da li to dolazi od ljudi ili iz nekih viših instanci? Gdje je izvor te prisile?

Hrvoje: Mislim da jednim dijelom interno sam na sebe vršiš pritisak. Živim u stanu gdje su oko mene većinom policajci i stari ljudi. I uvijek imam taj glas u glavi koji kaže: "Njima je to neprihvatljivo." Neki su spremni čak zvati policiju ili napraviti ozbiljnu situaciju, a to mi nije u interesu. Hvala Bogu na mom hrvatskom pasošu, jer me tehnički ne mogu izbaciti iz zemlje ako baš nešto ne uradim. Ali kada se stavim u poziciju kolega iz Bosne, Srbije i tih područja, mislim da bih bio oprezan na svakom koraku, jer ne znaš šta možeš uraditi da nekog aktiviraš.

Interviewer: Spomenuo si interno. Šta bi bio taj drugi, eksterni dio?

Hrvoje: Vidimo to kroz socijalne medije, online, na Instagramu, Facebooku, čak i u novinama. Pogotovo prije godinu ili godinu i po, kada je bila čitava situacija oko FPÖ-a, hoće li dobiti ili neće. Tada su se svi Ausländeri digli na noge, bili su nemirni, nije se znalo šta će biti.

Interviewer: A šta piše u tim novinama? Možeš malo o tome?

Hrvoje: Koliko je tu propaganda, ne znam, ali maltene svaki dan kada otvoriš neke novine, uvijek možeš vidjeti da je neki imigrant nešto uradio, ukrao nešto, ubio nekog. I svaki put kada pročitaš naslov, nekako u sebi pomisliš: "Joj, samo da nije naš. Samo da nije sa naših

prostora.” Uvijek postoji taj pritisak. Kada si van svoje zemlje, nikad nećeš stvarno biti ravnopravan. Ljudi se mogu truditi, ti se možeš truditi, ali razlike su očigledne. Nekad se ne pokaže odmah, ali s vremenom i kroz neke gluposti mišljenja se mogu potpuno podijeliti između tebe i te osobe.

Interviewer: Da li si se nekad lično osjećao diskriminirano ili kao da si skrajnut, kao neki oblik otheringa?

Hrvoje: Moram malo razmisliti. Pada mi na pamet period kada sam živio u studentskom domu. Kada su se pravila neka druženja, ljudi koji su tu bili već dvije godine, iz Beča, Austrije ili Njemačke, uvijek smo mi bili nekako po strani. Nisam ni znao šta se dešava dok se ne desi. Nikad nisam bio pozvan. To mi je tada smetalo. Opet kažem, postoji ta neka razlika. Nije lako uploviti u priču. Dok se ne probije taj neki led, treba više truda, a ja najradije ne bih da se smaram s tim, jer nisam izašao da se trudim, nego da se družim s ljudima.

Interviewer: Šta čini taj led? Koje su njegove ključne komponente?

Hrvoje: Rekao bih jezik, teme i uopšte viđenje svijeta. Austrijanci su možda malo više liberalni nego ljudi kod nas. Ima LGBTQ i tako to, znači moraš paziti da ne dotakneš neku temu koja je osjetljiva, a tebi je možda totalno nebitna. Mislim da se taj led sastoji od jezika i kulture.

Interviewer: Sada ćemo preći na digitalne platforme i digitalne mreže. Šta koristiš? Instagram, Facebook? Koji sadržaj gledaš, a da ima veze sa životom ovdje?

Hrvoje: Na Instagramu sam više nego na Facebooku. Pratim neke stranice, novine i tako nešto, čisto da budem informisan. Ima kanal “Tag Life Austria”, gdje zbijaju šale na osnovu kulture. To ne smatram lošim. Kroz šalu, taj neki video koji pogledam, na neki način me približi njihovoj kulturi i bude mi razumljivije. Puno više nego da mi neko teoretski objašnjava: “To je tako, to je tako.” Kad shvatiš humor neke nacije, mislim da si shvatio i naciju. “Tag Life Austria” se šali na sve moguće, ali uglavnom se tiče Bečlija, becirkova, nas Ausländera. Pratim i neke strane, ne zato što moraš, nego zato što imaš želju da budeš informisan, da znaš da li bježati ili kupovati nešto.

Interviewer: Kada kažeš “da li bježati”, zašto to kažeš? Šta piše tamo, kakav je taj sadržaj i kako se osjećaš povodom toga?

Hrvoje: Ima dijelom i toga, naravno, kako se piše o integraciji i nama u budućnosti. Ali više mislim na trenutnu situaciju u svijetu, jer se sve pokrenulo i kaos je.

Interviewer: Konkretno za Austriju, da li ima vijesti zbog kojih se osjećaš loše ili dobro?

Hrvoje: Prvo što mi pada na pamet je kada pročitam da je neki imigrant nešto uradio, neko izbođen ili slično. Ne očekujem od Beča da bude jedan od takvih gradova gdje se čovjek mora paziti. Pogotovo u područjima koja su turistički reklamirana, kao Prater, Schönbrunn i tako dalje. U zadnje vrijeme se vidi da i ovdje ima više kaotičnih novosti koje ne utiču dobro na tebe. Ja sam došao u Austriju da prođem što bezbolnije i da napravim sebi neki život. Austrija nije isto što je bila prije deset godina i čovjek uvijek gleda šta će biti, pogotovo u današnje vrijeme sa ratovima.

Interviewer: A pored Instagrama, da li pratiš neki sadržaj na YouTubeu?

Hrvoje: Na YouTubeu volim da gledam stand-up komičare, i strane i domaće. Neke stvari koje su specifične za austrijske državljane, ili neke stvari koje su specifične za nas. Kao što sam rekao, ako shvatiš humor, shvatiš čitavu naciju. To mi pomaže da se približim njihovoj perspektivi. Kada vidim reakcije publike i čujem smijeh, onda shvatim šta njih pokreće, šta shvataju kao humor, šta shvataju kao uvredljivo.

Interviewer: Kako bi opisao razliku između sadržaja koji sam biraš i sadržaja koji ti algoritam izbacuje?

Hrvoje: Teško mi je sve reći u jednom. Ako gledaš Instagram i Facebook, oni u zadnje vrijeme više idu u negativno nego u pozitivno. S druge strane, ako uključiš YouTube, ti sam tražiš sadržaj koji ćeš gledati i to je bolje. Sam biram šta gledati, uglavnom biram pozitivnije teme, parodije, komičare, nešto što probudi osjećaj da će biti dobro. A kod socijalnih medija, kao što su Instagram i Facebook, zavisi na koji sadržaj naletiš. Ima sadržaja koji promovišu integraciju, da budemo svi jedno. A s druge strane ima kratkih videa i novosti od pet sekundi gdje vidiš da je sve totalno izašlo iz korijena. Pogotovo u dijelovima koji nisu multikulturalno razvijeni, tipa manji gradovi ili sela, gdje još postoje staromodna viđenja. Kao i kod nas, manje-više, da se ne lažemo. Što se tiče YouTube sadržaja koji sam biraš, to je uglavnom pozitivno iskustvo i čovjek nešto nauči. A što se tiče sadržaja koji algoritam bira tebi, više vodi na neku negativu.

Interviewer: Za kraj, kada sumiramo sve ovo, imaš li ili nemaš osjećaj pripadnosti ovom prostoru gdje živiš? Kako bi to opisao kratko?

Hrvoje: Što se tiče trenutnog stanja, imam neki osjećaj pripadnosti, ili je to navika, ne mogu tačno reći. Budući da sam već jednom otišao iz države u kojoj sam bio 18 godina, gdje sam stekao društvo, familiju, navike i kulturu, sada ne bih imao nikakvih poteškoća da odem iz ove države ako nađem bolje mjesto ili ako bude moralo. Ne bih rekao da sam toliko integrisan da bi mi bilo teško otići. Mislim da ne osjećam neku duboku prihvaćenost, nego jednostavno za sada je situacija dobra i ovdje sam. Ali ako bih morao mijenjati posao ili mjesto boravka, da li bi to bila Slovenija, Finska ili nešto drugo, ne bih imao neki poseban osjećaj da napuštam Austriju. Čast izuzecima, naravno, uvijek imaš određenu grupu ljudi koji bi ti falili. Ali kada poredim Bosnu i Austriju, u Bosni je bilo mnogo ljudi – profesori, učitelji, društvo – gdje sam se osjećao dijelom skupine i bilo mi je žao izaći iz te skupine. Ovdje se ne osjećam kao dio neke skupine. Sumnjam da se ovdje iko stvarno osjeća kao dio neke skupine. Mislim da je ovdje uglavnom pojedinačno, individualno. Svoja četiri zida, to što imaš, to si ti. Kada izađeš van, lijepo je druženje i sve to, ali mislim da ovdje nije toliko izražen osjećaj skupine. Često sam se pitao da li je to zato što su Austrijanci takvi ili je to uopšte problem svake metropole. To je pitanje koje i dalje stoji i ne mogu odgovoriti jer je ovo jedina metropola koju sam osjetio. Ali ne bih rekao crno-bijelo da osjećam neku pripadnost, barem ne onako kako sam se osjećao dole na našim prostorima.

Interviewer: Super. Imaš li neka pitanja za mene? Da li bi još nešto dodao na sve ovo što smo pričali?

Hrvoje: Iznenadio sam se koliko ima degenerika u gradu koji se veže uz riječ kultura. Ako kažeš kultura, vjerovatno ti je Beč u mislima. Imao sam drugačija očekivanja. Kada sam došao ovdje i vidio neke situacije i neke dijelove grada, bilo je puno jadrnije nego kod nas dole. A kod nas kažu: sirotinja, nema se za kafu. Bio sam iznenađen i koliko se slobodno narkotici uzimaju. To mi je bilo jako čudno. Imao sam neki morbidan osjećaj u vezi sa čitavim gradom. Nisam volio generalno biti okružen ljudima. Gdje god sam išao, samo sam čekao da se nešto desi, neka opasnost. Te prve godine, a ni sada nije baš mnogo bolje, u nekim dijelovima jeste, ali nije da mogu reći: "Kad uđem kući, sada sam opušten." Uvijek imam u podsvijesti da ovo nije tvoje. Ovo nije tvoj stan, ono nije tvoj auto, ono nije tvoj parking. Ti si ovdje bukvalno samo gost.

Interviewer: Ok, hvala ti na razgovoru. Gasi sad ovo.

Intererview 5; I05

Datum 4.4.2026

Time: 19:30

Place: Google Meets

Interviewer: So, dear Ivan, can you introduce yourself and tell us how long you have been living in Vienna and something about yourself? What are you doing here, just the basic stuff.

Ivan: Yep. I am 26 years old. I am originally from Russia, Volgograd. I was born and raised there. My parents are from Ukraine. I came to Vienna on 10 July 2021, so it has been around four or five years since I have been here. I came here to study at university, Transcultural Communication, and I am two exams away from getting my bachelor's degree. I have been working in social fields for most of the time I have been living in Vienna. I worked as a translator in many different organizations, and now I have ended up in the homeless shelter where we both work. That is kind of what I do.

Interviewer: Okay. How important was this job for you during your stay here? How did you feel about having work? What did it bring to you?

Ivan: I started working pretty early, around six months after moving to Vienna. I think it was very important because I would not have achieved this level of German without working. My progress would not have been that fast if I had started working in English or if I had started working in German later. So I think it was immensely important that I started working pretty early after moving to Vienna.

Interviewer: And how would you describe your level of German right now? How satisfied are

you with your level?

Ivan: I am around 90% satisfied with my level of German. I would describe it as something between C1 and C2, with me being able to translate without any problems. I know a lot of terminology in some areas of my expertise or interest. Of course, there is always potential for improvement, but I am mostly satisfied. Sometimes I am surprised by how well I can express my thoughts in German.

Interviewer: And what role does language play in your case here?

Ivan: My bachelor's was in German. I wrote my bachelor's thesis in German. I use German on a daily basis at work and basically anywhere I go. I have friends who speak German or English and who do not speak Russian or Ukrainian. So German is very important. Also, for government matters, for example the residence permit, it is important to know German and to show a sufficient level of German.

Interviewer: You said that you mostly use German with your friends. Privately, with your crew or friends, do you mostly speak German?

Ivan: German or Russian. It depends on the group of friends. Most of the time it is German or Russian, or a weird mixture of both.

Interviewer: And how would you describe your social life here in Vienna? Can you tell us something general about the people you hang out with most?

Ivan: I am not that social sometimes. Although at work it might appear different, my circle of friends is quite narrow. But it consists of people that I truly love, believe in, and trust. I also had an Austrian partner, but we are no longer together. My social circle consists about 50% of people from the post-Soviet Union. I have a weird tendency of collecting friends from my past workplaces, also from social work contexts. The other 50% are people whose first language is German.

Interviewer: Now I would like to ask you about the term integration. How do you perceive the term integration? What does it mean to you?

Ivan: I studied Transcultural Communication, so I know the academic meaning of the term. But personally, I would describe integration as a mixture of being able to live your life in the country you have chosen without assistance from Betreuer, translators, or something like that, and also having basic knowledge of the culture, historical events, or pop-cultural events that form the culture in this country.

Interviewer: So you find it important to understand the host society or host culture? And when you say that you can live your own life, what does that mean for you?

Ivan: I think it is important, and it is also very interesting to learn about different cultures, especially about the country where you currently live. In my case, I plan to stay here, so I think it is important and interesting. I have met many people who have been in Austria for more than five or ten years and who do not really know the language. They cannot manage basic things in life, for example going to a doctor, going to MA35, or doing similar things without help from friends who know German and another language that the person speaks, or from their children. So integration also means being able to exist in the country.

Interviewer: So you mean institutional things, but also everyday life?

Ivan: Yes, institutional things, but also basic communication, making friendships, getting to know people around you who might not be from your country of origin or might not speak your first language. Basically, being able to exist in the country.

Interviewer: How would you describe belonging to this country? What does belonging mean to you? Do you feel that you belong here, especially in Vienna?

Ivan: Yes, I think so. I feel much more accepted here than in my country of origin. I can exist here freely and 99% without any shame or fear for my life.

Interviewer: What kind of fear do you mean?

Ivan: I was born and raised in Russia. There are many different types of fear that you have in countries like that, countries that are not democratic or that have many oppressive laws. Austria is not a country like that. I really enjoy the culture. I know a lot about Austrian culture and European culture in general, and I feel accepted here. I have a sense of belonging here.

Interviewer: Was there any situation here when you had the feeling that you were not accepted? What is your experience with administration, visa processes, or situations where you did not feel accepted?

Ivan: I can tell you maybe three instances. Sometimes when I talk about childhood with a person who was born and raised in Austria, we mostly have the same references, the same things we watched while growing up, but not always. Speaking about administration, up to this point everything was okay, but the current extension of my residence permit is a bit complicated. Still, I do not feel like I do not belong. Bureaucracy is just part of existence here.

Interviewer: You mentioned that when you talk with people who were born and raised here, sometimes there is a difference in childhood references. Can you explain that?

Ivan: If you grew up at the beginning of the 2000s, you mostly grew up watching the same things, the same cartoons or shows from Europe or the US, maybe in your native language, but basically the same things. But sometimes the experiences, the places you went to, things you watched, or things you experienced in school are different. That is interesting, but it is also a clear difference that you can notice.

Interviewer: The next chapter is about digital platforms and social networks in Vienna. What social networks do you use most, and what kind of content do you follow? Do you follow content connected with Vienna, Austria, or German-language content?

Ivan: I think I follow content in four or five languages. If we are talking about Vienna or Austria, most of the content about Austria that I follow is in German. The social media platforms I use are Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, and YouTube. If it is something about Vienna or Austria, then the content is most likely in German.

Interviewer: Can you say more specifically what you follow?

Ivan: I follow ORF, which is one of the most popular media outlets here. I also follow some bloggers who talk about places you can visit. One of them is in English, a person from the US who has lived in Vienna for many years and talks about food spots in Vienna. But that is probably the only content about Vienna that I follow in English, not in German.

Interviewer: Let us focus on the German-language content. I would like to find out how this kind of content helps you or does not help you to feel more part of this society. Does it help you with German or with finding your way here?

Ivan: Austrian German is a bit different from Hochdeutsch, the standard German norm. I follow many Austrian meme pages or pages about Austrian culture, Austrian memes, and Austrian cultural references. It helps me understand references and sometimes words from dialects that I did not know before and came across through social media. I also discovered many spots in the city through social media, through different German-language accounts. That definitely helps me in my life.

Interviewer: So can we conclude that understanding dialects, jokes, and cultural references helps you feel more belonging?

Ivan: Yes. Understanding the dialect, common jokes, and references can improve your feeling of belonging or your sense of belonging. I can agree with that.

Interviewer: Can you name one page that you follow with this kind of memes?

Ivan: I can send it later, but there is one about Floridsdorf. It is dedicated to Floridsdorf, places there, and the way people speak to each other. I find it amusing and funny. There is also another one, I think something like "Austrian political memes", which makes fun of political events or situations in Austria. Another important satirical medium in Austria is "Die Tagespresse". It is basically like a news satire page. Their articles make fun of cultural or political events in the country.

Interviewer: Do you have the right to vote here in Austria?

Ivan: No.

Interviewer: Then why do you follow political content if you do not have the right to vote?

Ivan: I love politics. I am genuinely interested in politics. Also, the decisions these people make can improve my life or make my life harder. So it is important to know. And I will eventually be able to vote.

Interviewer: So currently you cannot vote because you are not a citizen?

Ivan: Yes. I am not a citizen, so I cannot vote here.

Interviewer: So you cannot vote here, but the content you follow about politics helps you understand what is going on in the country?

Ivan: Exactly, what is going on in the country.

Interviewer: Do you feel discriminated against because you cannot vote?

Ivan: I do not necessarily feel discriminated against because of that, because I do not have citizenship here. So it is logical that I cannot vote here. But it is interesting to follow politics in general, at least for me. Also, to be integrated is to be in the context of a country, and politics is one part of that.

Interviewer: Can you explain the link between not being able to vote institutionally and still following political content online?

Ivan: I can put this whole thing into different boxes. First, politics in general can be quite entertaining. If you like the decision-making process and that type of stuff, it can be interesting, especially when you have a direct connection to the events because you live in this country. Second, those decisions affect my life. For example, if immigration laws or citizenship laws change, that is important for people who cannot vote but are affected by those decisions. Third, I will probably be able to vote in 2028, so it is better not to start from scratch later, but to get acquainted with the whole game long before you can participate. Fourth, in relation to belonging, if you know this stuff, you can talk to other people about it. It can help with small talk, friendships, or occasional conversations. I think it is important because it is a big part of life.

Interviewer: So political memes and political content are important because they allow you to participate in small talk in real life?

Ivan: Yes. I can laugh about it myself and with other people. Sharing content is also, for some people, a kind of love language, in friendship or relationship situations. It is a very common practice in the twenty-first century.

Interviewer: Okay, we will end here. Thank you, Ivan.

Ivan: You are welcome.

Interview 6; I06

Datum 2.4.2026

Time: 19:30

Place: Google Meets

Interviewer: E super, čao Mija. Prvi set pitanja je u vezi sa tvojim biografskim podacima. Da li bi mogla da nam se predstaviš, odakle dolaziš, koliko dugo živiš u Beču i tako neke osnovne stvari?

Mia: Da. Zovem se Mia, dolazim iz Zenice, iz Bosne i Hercegovine. Tu sam odrasla. Godine 2017, u svojoj 19. godini života, preselila sam se u Beč, u Austriju. Studiram i radim. Živim u Austriji već devet godina.

Interviewer: A kaži mi, šta si studirala, šta studiraš i gdje si radila?

Mia: Studirala sam prvo ruski jezik i književnost na Univerzitetu u Beču. Onda sam to prekinula, pa sam prešla na transkulturalnu komunikaciju, da idem za prevoditelja, sa jezicima njemački, engleski, bosanski, hrvatski, srpski. Međutim, i to sam na kraju prestala, jer sam morala da se finansiram sama, a tada još nismo imali ta neka pravila da možemo raditi kao studenti više.

Interviewer: Čekaj, možeš li nešto reći o tim pravilima? Na šta tačno misliš?

Mia: Znači, ja imam hrvatsko državljanstvo, ali do prije par godina za hrvatske državljane još nisu važila potpuno ista pravila za EU studente. Tako da smo mogli raditi samo 20 sati sedmično kao studenti, umjesto 40. Studenti u Austriji mogu raditi 40 sati i studirati uporedo. To za mene tada nije bilo moguće. To se tek nakon par godina uvelo. Mislim da je sada tako da se može studirati i raditi puno radno vrijeme.

Interviewer: Znači, to ti je na neki način otežavalo situaciju finansijski?

Mia: Pa jeste. Nije mi bilo dovoljno raditi 20 sati da pokrijem sve račune i sve ostalo što mi je potrebno za život.

Interviewer: A kako bi trenutno opisala svoj svakodnevni život u Beču? Šta radiš, čime se baviš? I isto vezano za to, kako bi opisala svoj društveni život, krug prijatelja s kojim provodiš vrijeme?

Mia: Svoju prvu grupu prijatelja i ljude sa kojima sam se najbliže spojila i najbolji kontakt ostvarila upoznala sam preko Tindera. Zapravo, jednog lika sam upoznala i onda sam postala prijateljica s njim. Preko njega sam upoznala svu njegovu raju iz škole, jer je on tu živio i odrastao. Baš su me fino prihvatili. Međutim, i oni su bili iz internacionalne škole, tako da je to uglavnom bila internacionalna raja. Pričali su većinski na engleskom jeziku, umjesto na

njemačkom.

Moj život je uglavnom bio fokusiran na rad i društveni život. Ne mogu reći da nisam imala društvo, ali nije mi bilo toliko slobodno. Nisam imala pristup ljudima kao dok sam bila u Bosni, u Zenici. Manji je grad, sporije ide život, pa se lakše možeš dogovarati s ljudima. Ovdje su svi stalno u svojim svjetovima i poslovima, tako da je bilo malo teško. Bila sam baš usamljena, moram priznati.

Interviewer: A kakvo ti je iskustvo sa njemačkim jezikom i kako je to teklo hronološki? Kako si se osjećala povodom učenja jezika? Da li je za fakultet bilo neophodno?

Mia: Ja sa njemačkim iskreno nisam imala problem. Učila sam njemački u osnovnoj školi. Učila sam ga i kod kuće, preko TV-a. Kada sam došla u Beč, već sam pričala njemački, skoro tečno. Tako da što se toga tiče imam jednu zanimljivu perspektivu. Ljudi s kojima sam dolazila u kontakt, Austrijanci, nisu odmah mogli skontati da sam strankinja. Neki su mislili da sam iz Njemačke, zato što sam njemački učila preko TV-a, pa pričam baš Hochdeutsch.

Tako da su uvijek mislili da sam iz Njemačke i samim tim su me, ja bih rekla, odmah drugačije tretirali. Imali su drugačiji stav prema meni. Onda mi je bilo jako neprijatno kada sam vidjela kako se ponašaju prema ljudima koji imaju malo akcenta, koji nabadaju riječi i ne znaju dobro njemački. Odmah imaju drugačije stavove prema njima. To me jako pogađalo. To licemjerstvo mi nije sjelo nikako.

Interviewer: U kojoj mjeri bi sada rekla da si upoznata sa životom u Austriji i Beču, s obzirom na to da si već znala jezik?

Mia: Mislim da sam prilično dobro shvatila njihove socijalne norme.

Interviewer: Šta podrazumijevaš pod socijalnim normama?

Mia: Njihove običaje pozdravljanja kada se negdje uđe, uvijek imaju „Grüß Gott“ ili „Guten Tag“. Također, malo su povučeni, nisu odmah otvoreni. Prvo malo ispitaju situaciju. Pod socijalnim normama mislim na njihov način komunikacije, kako se ponašaju. Dosta cijene pravila, ali nisu, na primjer, tako strogi kao Nijemci. Bitno im je da si na vrijeme, da se najaviš. Dosta su direktni, ali opet ne previše.

Interviewer: Kako bi se kulturološki osjećala? Da li se smatraš upoznatom sa životom ovdje?

Mia: Do te mjere da znam na koji način oni funkcionišu i razmišljaju, ali ne do te mjere da sam ja to preuzela kao svoje. Ako to ima smisla.

Interviewer: Ima smisla. Sada prelazimo na drugi set pitanja. Kada kažem riječ integracija, šta za tebe znači integracija?

Mia: To mi je najdraži dio. Kada čujem riječ integracija, meni to lično već ima negativnu konotaciju. Zbog tih priča koje sam čula, ne mogu reći iskustava koje sam imala, jer kao što sam rekla, ja njemački jezik dobro znam i samim tim sam drugačije tretirana. Lično nemam neka negativna iskustva.

Integracija mi ima negativnu konotaciju zbog svega što sam čula i vidjela. Integracija je jedna od onih ideja koje na papiru zvuče predobro. Pogotovo u Beču. Beč se gleda kao jedna uspješna priča integracije. Na papiru je to sve super, divno, krasno, ali u stvarnosti je jako haotično i neujednačeno. Čak je frustrirajuće, uglavnom za sve uključene, i za manjine, a isto tako i za većinu.

Interviewer: U kom smislu? Možeš li dati neki konkretan primjer?

Mia: Uzet ćemo jezik kao primjer. Jezik i neuspjela integracija. Čula sam da dosta djece iz migrantskih porodica ne koristi njemački jezik kod kuće. To se često uzima kao primjer loše integracije ili kao dokaz da integracija ne radi. Onda se završi u echo chamberu, što imamo dosta na digitalnim medijima, gdje svako u svom svijetu čuje samo ono što potvrđuje njegove već postojeće stavove.

Interviewer: A kada bih rekao termin belonging, odnosno pripadnost, šta je za tebe pripadnost u nekoj sredini?

Mia: To bi značilo da se osjećamo prihvaćeno, da imamo jednaka prava i da pravila važe za nas kao i za ljude koji su tu već bili prije nas. Znači, trebalo bi značiti da ljudi iz različitih kulturnih, etničkih i društvenih sredina dijele prostor, prilike i neki zajednički identitet. Da se ide ka zajedničkom identitetu, a ne samo da se ljudi tolerišu. Znači, da se nešto gradi zajedno.

U Beču je velika stvar što se stvara segregacija u stanovanju, po kvartovima. Uglavnom se dešava da djeca idu u iste škole, ali se onda svi odvajaju u svoje klike i grupice. Jedni od drugih ostaju uvijek sa svojim. Onda se stvara nerazumijevanje jednih prema drugima. Jedni misle

da se drugi ne pokušavaju dovoljno integrisati, a s druge strane, drugi misle da im nije pružena ni šansa da budu prihvaćeni.

Interviewer: A kakvo je tvoje iskustvo sa traženjem stana i tim stvarima?

Mia: Nisam nikad konkurisala za gradski stan, jer mislim da ne znam koliko godina moraš živjeti ovdje da bi stekao taj uslov. Uglavnom sam tražila stanove preko Willhabena i privatne stanove. Ne znam koliko je to zbog mog imena i prezimena, jer se po prezimenu vidi da nisam iz Austrije ili iz njemačkog govornog područja, ali nije bilo lako. Često ne dobiješ ni odgovor. Ne znam koliko to mogu povezati sa imenom i prezimenom, a koliko sa tim što je stvarno velika potražnja, pa ljudi možda ni ne vide sve. Ali od drugih ljudi sam čula da oni smatraju da je uglavnom zbog toga što se vidi da nisu odavde, ili zato što ne napišu dovoljno dobro poruku na njemačkom za oglas.

Interviewer: Da li bi imala još nešto da izdvojiš u vezi sa osjećajem otheringa, odnosno osjećajem da si izbačena iz nekih tokova?

Mia: Stvarno, ruku na srce, lično nisam imala takva iskustva. Čak su ljudi imali pozitivnu reakciju na mene. Kada me pitaju da li sam iz Njemačke, a ja im kažem da sam iz Bosne i Hercegovine, onda budu iznenađeni i kao ponosni što sam se tako potrudila da naučim njihov jezik. To mi je lijepo.

Ali pošto sam radila kao konobarica, slušala sam svakakve priče iz prve ruke od drugih ljudi. Dok ne znaju da sam „Jugo“, pričaju svakakva sranja, a onda kada kažem odakle sam, ušute se. Čula sam svakakve pogrđne riječi. To mi je nekako glavno ostalo.

Čak i moji prijatelji, studenti, mladi, otvoreni, na društvenim mrežama pričaju pozitivno o migrantima, ali uvijek postoji ono „ali“. Uvijek kažu: „Ali ima ih malo previše.“ Neka ih, ali ne treba previše. To me sve u svemu uvijek jako razočaravalo. Iz tog razloga se godinama nisam osjećala prihvaćeno u Beču, iako opet ponavljam da ja lično nisam imala negativna iskustva. Ali sve to što sam čula i vidjela od drugih stvaralo je osjećaj u meni kao da ni ja sama ne pripadam tu. Tako da se i nakon devet godina nisam osjećala kao dio te zajednice.

Interviewer: Sada prelazimo na digitalni svijet. Koje društvene mreže koristiš?

Mia: U digitalnom svijetu sam do nedavno najviše vremena provodila na Instagramu. Zadnjih par godina mislim da sam najviše svog života, nažalost, provela tamo. Isto tako sam i na TikToku, jer TikTok je nekako drugačiji od Instagrama. Instagram gledam kao nešto za prijatelje, povezivanje i ostajanje u toku. TikTok mi je više koristan. Imam osjećaj da na TikToku mogu puno više da naučim, jer je zanimljivije. Drugačije interagujem sa videima na TikToku, pa samim tim imam i drugačiji content. Naučim nešto korisno.

YouTube sam prije koristila, sada puno manje. Facebook nikako, tu su samo boomeri. Na Facebooku sam samo da pratim kakvi se eventi dešavaju, jer to mi je super što Facebook ima evente. Onda možeš vidjeti šta se dešava u tvojoj blizini.

Interviewer: Možeš li izdvojiti neke konkretne sadržaje koji su vezani za ovu okolinu ovdje, konkretno sa Instagrama, TikToka ili YouTubea?

Mia: Na TikToku, kada kažem da sam nešto naučila, uglavnom su to teme o religiji, to me dosta zanima, pa o tome dosta gledam. Astrologija i tako to. Što se tiče Beča, ako tražim hranu, restorane i tako, to pratim na Instagramu. Na TikToku, ako sam nekad nešto tražila vezano za Beč, to je bilo kada mi neko dolazi u posjetu, pa brzinski ukucam: „best sites to visit“, najbolja mjesta za posjetiti, ili „šta raditi u Beču u 24 sata“.

Jedino što pratim na Instagramu vezano za content jesu njihove vijesti, njihove Instagram stranice od novina.

Interviewer: Koje medije pratiš na Instagramu?

Mia: Pratila sam Heute, pratila sam Der Standard, pratila sam i neku crnu hroniku. Uglavnom ih pratim da vidim kakve gluposti pričaju, jer rijetko kada bude nešto konkretno korisno. Više gledam i nerviram se.

Interviewer: Na koje gluposti misliš? Ima li to veze sa temom integracije?

Mia: Ima. Ne znam da li je to bilo prošle ili pretprošle godine, mislim da je Heute objavio da je riječ godine među mladima bila „remigracija“ ili nešto tako. Toga se dobro sjećam. Sjećam se diskursa koji je nastao u komentarima tog posta i koliko je bilo presmiješno. Da nije smiješno, bilo bi tužno. Kao komentari na Facebooku, kada se ljudi krenu raspravljati.

Interviewer: Uglavnom negativno ili pozitivno?

Mia: Bude i jednog i drugog. Nekad se čovjek iznenadi kakve stvari ljudi pišu, koliko negativne

stvari i bez imalo kritičkog razmišljanja. A isto tako se iznenadiš kako neki ljudi znaju lijepo reći nešto i pokušati dokazati suprotno. Zna biti svega.

Interviewer: Rekla si da ti društvene mreže služe i za snalaženje, da budeš u toku sa dešavanjima u gradu?

Mia: Ima jedna stranica gdje uvijek opisuju sve evente koji se dešavaju, na primjer u noćnom životu. Mislim da se zove „Ohschonhell“. To je stranica gdje možeš otići po kalendaru, klikneš na dan i vidiš koji se sve eventi dešavaju taj dan u gradu. Bukvalno ima sve, od partija do food truckova, muzike i kulture.

Isto jedna zanimljiva stvar, ako mogu da dodam na integraciju: Beč se stvarno trudi, ali to je opet samo na površnom nivou. Održava se dosta kulturnih i kulturoloških eventa, tipa Afrika Tage i tako dalje, gdje se pravi osjećaj da si prihvaćen, da ima nešto iz tvoje kulture. Ali u biti je to samo površno. Ne dotiče se suština problema, kao što su ekonomsko stanje, razlike u prilikama za poslove i tako dalje.

Interviewer: Kako bi opisala svoj doživljaj digitalnih mreža? Na koji način one doprinose osjećaju pripadnosti sredini? Kakva je za tebe relacija između društvenih mreža i pripadnosti?

Mia: Za mene konkretno, Instagram sam najviše koristila. To mi je bila prva aplikacija kojom sam se uvijek vodila što se svega tiče. Mogla sam pratiti ljude oko sebe, dešavanja oko sebe i svašta nešto. Mogla sam pričati s ljudima i pokazivati sebe. To mi je bilo super, dok mi nije postalo jedan oblik kaveza.

Društvene mreže mi daju priliku da budem nešto što želim biti, što još nisam, što mogu biti ili što ne znam kako da budem. Onda se stvara kompletna fragmentacija mene, gdje sam jedna osoba u stvarnom životu kada pričam njemački, druga osoba sa grupom prijatelja s kojima pričam engleski, treća osoba sa ljudima s kojima pričam na našem jeziku, a onda neka četvrta ili peta osoba na društvenim mrežama. Tu mogu sve da miješam i onda se totalno izgubim u svemu tome. Tako da je meni lično to i otežavalo i olakšavalo. Treba se pametno koristiti društvenim mrežama i digitalnim tehnologijama. Sve u svojim granicama može biti i dobro i loše.

Interviewer: A u kontekstu integracije?

Mia: Konkretno, dalo mi je privid kontrole i osjećaj lakoće. Kao da je lako spojiti se s ljudima i lako ostati u kontaktu. Ali onda stalno gledati to i biti samo online, a ne djelovati stvarno, to je meni otežalo osjećaj integracije. Zato sam odlučila da izbrišem te društvene mreže i da više budem tu, da se izlažem lično i da se pokažem onako kako stvarno jesam.

Interviewer: Ok, super. To je to, hvala ti. Sada ćemo ugasiti recording.

Intererview 7; I07

Datum 5.4.2026

Time: 16:30

Place: Google Meets

Interviewer: U vezi sa tim, u kojoj mjeri bi opisao koliko si upoznat sa životom ovdje, društvom generalno, pravilima, zakonima i tako dalje? U kojoj mjeri bi rekao da poznaješ austrijsko društvo ili život u Beču generalno?

Jovan: Pošto sam ovdje već prilično dugo, i to u nekim formativnim godinama svog života, od početka dvadesetih do sada već skoro tridesete, mislim da sam najviše naučio kroz životno iskustvo. Prije svega kroz tu silnu birokratiju kroz koju moraš da prođeš. Tako da sam dosta upoznat, ne na nivou da sada polažem za državljanstvo, za to bih definitivno morao da sjednem i prođem kroz zakone, ali ovako sam definitivno upoznat sa načinom života.

Za neke specifične stvari se poprilično razumijem, jer sam prošao i kroz studije, i kroz brak, i kroz različite oblike vize, i dosta razgovora s advokatima. Tako da mislim da sam poprilično upoznat.

Interviewer: A kako bi opisao taj dio sa institucionalnim okvirom? Kako si se osjećao kada si morao da prolaziš kroz sve te birokratske borbe, produžavanje vize, fakultet? Da li je to bilo nešto novo za tebe? Da li te to opteretilo?

Jovan: Definitivno. Kao young adult, imao sam 21 godinu kada sam došao, mislim da je to bio ogroman zalogaj za mene. Jako puno pritiska, jako puno obaveza za koje možda nisam bio toliko spreman u tom trenutku. Mislim da je to imalo veze i sa mojim sazrijevanjem. Da sam

došao malo stariji i već formiraniji kao čovjek, mislim da bih lakše sve to podnio. Ali da, definitivno je bio ogroman teret.

Bio je ogroman teret i taj osjećaj shvatanja koliko je migracija kriminalizovana ovdje, ili generalno u svijetu, negdje manje, negdje više.

Interviewer: Šta misliš pod tim kriminalizovana?

Jovan: U smislu načina ophođenja sa ljudima. Taj osjećaj da si samo ovca ili broj u sistemu. To može zaista da proizvede takvo osjećanje. Jako puno posla, jako puno stresa, jako puno različitih situacija sa granicama, magistratom, policijom, svim i svačim.

Interviewer: Kada čuješ termin integracija, šta bi to značilo za tebe?

Jovan: Za mene je to nekako osjećaj pripadnosti na nekom nivou. Da li socijalnom ili community-based, da nekako nisi nevidljiv, da imaš neki udio u društvu. Za mene je to lično želja da budem prihvaćen, naravno ne kao potpuna asimilacija, da me tretiraju isto kao da sam odavde, nego jednostavno neko razumijevanje i odnošenje prema meni kao prema individui i osobi sa svojim dostignućima, vrijednostima i talentima, a ne prvo pasoš, pa onda sve ostalo. Bar u krugovima u kojima sam ja bio, postojao je taj osjećaj kada si na nekoj žurci ili na akademiji: „Aha, odakle si? Iz Srbije? Ok.“ I onda se priča sa nekim ko je iz Francuske. Tako da za mene integracija znači da nisam sveden samo na to odakle dolazim.

Interviewer: Kada bi povezao to što si sada rekao sa birokratskim stvarima, sa svim tim borbama i trenjima, kako bi povezao pojam integracije sa tim birokratskim dijelom?

Jovan: Definitivno osjećaj toga da imaš papire ili da nemaš papire jako puno mijenja. Bar meni mijenja odnos prema interakcijama koje imam i prema željama koje imam. Mijenja svakodnevni pristup mom životu ovdje, jer bio sam u situacijama da sam bio ilegalan. Kada si bez papira, to u meni budi osjećaj da ništa nema smisla, da sve što radim ovdje ne važi ni za šta. Bilo kakvo iskustvo, profesionalno, romantično ili socijalno, djeluje kao da ima rok trajanja. Ničemu se nisam prepuštao previše. To se definitivno mijenja sa zvaničnim papirima.

Interviewer: To je zapravo ono što sam htio da te pitam. Imaš li još nešto da dodaš na to?

Jovan: To je neki tok misli samo. Ja mogu da pričam onako kako pričam.

Interviewer: To i treba tako da bude. Prešli bismo sada na upotrebu socijalnih mreža i digitalnih platformi koje koristiš od perioda kada živiš ovdje. Koje društvene mreže najviše koristiš?

Jovan: Kada sam se preselio, Facebook je već krenuo da slabi, ali je i dalje bio mjesto gdje se povezuješ sa dosta ljudi, pogotovo zbog opcije „People you may know“. Tu sam se povezao sa dosta ljudi sa Akademije koje sam možda samo vidio ili upoznao.

Definitivno je Instagram glavna društvena mreža koja je istrajala kroz moje vrijeme ovdje. Već jednu deceniju sam ovdje, a Instagram je i dalje prisutan. Naravno, TikTok je trenutno glavna društvena mreža, pogotovo za content.

Interviewer: Možeš li nešto reći o sadržajima koje pratiš na Instagramu, TikToku ili YouTubeu? U kojoj mjeri su vezani za život ovdje, za Austriju, za Beč? Da li neki influenceri, tiktokeri, umjetnici ili nešto vezano za život u Beču dolazi do tebe?

Jovan: Da, definitivno. Ali nije da sam ja ikada aktivno tražio takve stvari. Prosto, algoritam i sve ostalo dođu do tebe. Što više ljudi znaš, više dolaze stvari koje su možda „if you know, you know“, odnosno stvari koje ti daju osjećaj pristupa nekim forama, slengu i razumijevanju nekih lokalnih stvari. To najviše dolazi kroz prijatelje, ali i kroz doomscrolling. Relevantne stvari dolaze iz krugova u kojima sam.

Interviewer: A možeš li izdvojiti nešto konkretno što pratiš?

Jovan: Rekao bih ulične intervju, to mnogo volim da gledam. Bilo da su vezani za modu, šta ljudi nose na ulicama, ili generalno za neke teme. U svemu tome postoji doza ciničnosti i sarkazma. Ne znam da li je to zbog mog iskustva ili moje ličnosti, ali to je ono što najviše volim. Izdvojio bih Toxische Pommes, jer mislim da najviše pogađa srž samosvjesnog iskustva osobe sa Balkana koja je ovdje dio društva.

Interviewer: Da li te takve stvari na neki način opuštaju? Kako se osjećaš kada to gledaš? Kako te to povezuje sa životom ovdje? Da li se osjećaš kao dio zajednice ili ne?

Jovan: To se dosta mijenja vremenom. Ja sam ovdje bio u vezi sa osobom iz Srbije dugi niz godina, tako da je postojao mali kosmos u mom privatnom prostoru, u stanu, koji nije morao toliko da ima veze sa realnošću i društvom. Ali pošto sam želio da pustim korijenje ovdje i da bar pokušam da se integrišem na bilo kom nivou, to se dosta promijenilo kroz prethodne tri-četiri godine.

Definitivno se osjećam viđeno kroz neke od tih sadržaja. Ne osjećam se toliko sam u svemu tome. Taj sarkazam ili taj nivo humora, koji dolazi ne samo od naših ljudi ili drugih migranata, nego i kao dio youth culture ovdje, čini da se osjećam viđeno. Ne osjećam da je to samo moje singularno iskustvo.

To mi je posebno pomagalo u prošlosti. Trenutno se ne osjećam toliko usamljeno u svemu tome, jer imam više iskustva. Ali postoji i drugi sloj, a to je da sam queer osoba, tako da postoji još jedan sloj marginalizacije u bilo kojoj okolini i društvu. Većina društva je okrenuta normativnim straight parovima. To definitivno utiče na osjećaj pripadnosti, integracije i svega ostalog. Kod dosta queer ljudi community je važniji od toga odakle si, tako da je to specifično iskustvo.

Interviewer: Ako bismo sada napravili mali zaključak, na koji način digitalne tehnologije i sve o čemu smo pričali utiču na to da pripadaš ovoj sredini? Šta za tebe znači pripadati? Kako bi napravio razliku između integracije i pripadanja, i u to uključio digitalne tehnologije?

Jovan: Mislim da su društvene mreže jako veliki pomak. Lakše možeš da se uključiš na neki wavelength, na neki talas ili način razmišljanja u društvu kao što je ovdje. Lakše možeš da razumiješ lokalni humor, lokalni slang, i da nađeš ljude koji su slični tebi.

Ali, kao i sve stvari, algoritam može da bude problematičan. Možeš se uključiti i na ekstremističke strane gdje ljudi pričaju stvari koje su poprilično fašističke.

Interviewer: A da li tih stvari više prepoznaješ institucionalno, na ulicama, kroz birokratiju ili na mrežama? Gdje više prepoznaješ te oblike odbacivanja?

Jovan: Definitivno kroz instituciju i birokratiju. Većina ljudi koji rade na tim pozicijama su uglavnom stariji. Tu postoji neki sistem. Čak i na Akademiji, koja je umjetnički fakultet, opet je institucija. Čak i tamo si samo ovca u sistemu u nekom smislu.

Interviewer: Posljednje pitanje: da li se osjećaš kao da pripadaš Beču, ovom društvu? Da li misliš da si dio ovog society?

Jovan: Na neki svoj način, mislim da sam se na ličnom nivou izborio za mjesto u društvu. Ne mogu da kažem da pripadam na klasičnom nivou, ali bih rekao da na neki alternativan način, u specifičnim krugovima, da.

Interviewer: A šta za tebe znači klasičan način?

Jovan: Kada pomislim na society, pomislim na upper middle class, straight društvo. Mislim da je to većina društva svuda, ne samo ovdje. U tom smislu bih rekao apsolutno ne. Ne mislim da sam neki „respectable“ građanin u tom klasičnom smislu. Ali u krugovima koji su meni bitni i važni, rekao bih da pripadam.

Interviewer: Super. Da li bi imao još nešto za kraj da kažeš?

Jovan: Iskreno sam ti odgovorio na sve. Nisam se pripremao, samo sam pročitao pitanja. Možda nemam terminologiju, ali sam pričao kako mislim.

Interviewer: Ne treba da imaš terminologiju. Poenta je da pričaš onako kako se osjećaš. To je to. Sada ćemo ugasiti recording.

Interview 8; 108

Datum 5.4.2026

Time: 19:30

Place: Google Meets

Interviewer: Hello, Marija. Can you shortly introduce yourself and tell us something more about you? What are you doing here, what did you study, what are you doing for work and for a living? How long have you been in Vienna, and how old are you?

Marija: I am Marija. I am 26 years old. I came to Vienna about a month before I turned 15. That was in August or September 2014, so it has been a little less than twelve years now. I did school here. I finished school in Austria, and I also finished school in Russia. I am from Russia. I finished a bachelor's degree at the University of Vienna. I studied Sociology, and now I am trying to finish Psychology. I have two exams left, and that will be my second bachelor's degree.

Shortly before I finished Sociology, I started working. There was a brief moment of around a year or a year and a half when I was doing two studies at the same time, Sociology and Psychology. My plan originally was to start Psychology, but I did not pass the entrance exam

on the first try. So I started Sociology, and then I continued because I was already halfway through the studies.

When the war in Ukraine started, I started volunteering at the main railway station. Then they started looking for people to hire, so I started working there. First I was volunteering, and then I started working there. Later they closed the project because they did not want to finance it anymore, or they could not finance it anymore.

Then I started working in what I think is the biggest housing project for refugees. It used to be only for Ukrainian refugees, but starting in January, more people with other statuses also started coming to us. So it used to be primarily for Ukrainian refugees, and now it is basically a house for all refugees.

Interviewer: How would you describe your level of German right now? And can you remember how it was at the beginning, with the language and those kinds of things?

Marija: I started learning German about a year and a half before I moved to Austria. It was not really going well because I did not really want to learn German. The whole move to Austria was kind of my parents' idea. I did not really want to move.

Then I started school here. The first school year I was in an English international school, and then I switched to an Austrian school for the rest of the time. After that, I went to university.

I would say my German is okay, but I do not feel confident in it. I feel like for a person who has been here for eleven years, it should be better. In an Austrian school, you do not really do grammar anymore because people who speak German as their first language do not go over grammar in high school. So I feel like I have not refreshed a lot of grammar, and I definitely lack grammar knowledge. That is what makes me feel not as confident in my German as I could be.

I am also really not confident in my written German. I do not really text in German a lot because I do not have many people that I text in German with. So I do not feel confident in that aspect either.

Interviewer: How would you describe your social life here in Vienna? Are you mostly spending time with German native speakers? How much are you using German in everyday life?

Marija: I use a lot of German at work, but I also use a lot of Russian at work because most of my clients are Russian-speaking or Ukrainian-speaking. A lot of my colleagues are Russian speakers, so we speak Russian, but I also speak German.

I do not have a lot of friends, but one of my friends is my colleague at work. She speaks German and Russian because her mother is Russian and her father is Austrian. She grew up here, but she speaks both languages. We mostly speak German. With Ivan, we obviously speak Russian.

So I would say I use both equally, maybe. There are not many people that I talk to on a daily basis, but it is a mix of German and Russian. With my family, I obviously use Russian.

Interviewer: Can you shortly describe how you feel about the host country culture, about Austria and especially Vienna? How much do you know about it, and do you think this is important?

Marija: Compared to Ivan, who is very familiar with the cultural and political climate of Austria, I do not really feel that knowledgeable. Even though he has been here for a shorter time than I have, compared to him and compared to my Austrian colleagues or colleagues who have been here for a while, I do not feel like I am really knowledgeable.

I do not really care about political stuff, to be honest, because I cannot participate in anything political.

Interviewer: Why? Because you are not allowed to participate?

Marija: Yes. But I also do not really have interest in political things, to be honest. Even if I could participate, compared to Ivan or a lot of people I know who are very politically engaged, I would say I am not.

In cultural aspects, I know the things that I have come into contact with, but I would not say that I was actively looking for or reaching out to find out more about the culture, especially in the first years here. Before I started working, I was not really engaging with the culture. Of course, I spoke German at school and at university, but only because I needed to. Then I kind of went back to just being by myself.

I was not necessarily engaging with the culture unless I was forced to. I feel like it became

better since I started working because I came into contact with more Austrian and German-speaking people. I also kind of overcame my fear of talking to Austrian people and German-speaking people. So it became better. But because I missed a lot in the first years, when I was not engaging with people as much, I still have a lot of catching up to do.

Interviewer: Regarding this previous question, how would you describe the term integration? What does it mean for you?

Marija: I feel like integration is understanding the cultural practices of the place where you live, and also being able to participate in those practices. So it is both knowledge and doing, participating.

Interviewer: What is the meaning of being able to participate? What kind of participation?

Marija: Generally, I think it means understanding how life works and being connected. It is being able to do daily tasks, like going to the supermarket or going to the doctor, engaging with people from the culture, speaking with them. It does not necessarily mean only speaking the language, but being able to communicate with people, understanding humor, things like that. Being able to do the daily tasks you would do in your home culture or home country. Just living a normal life.

Interviewer: Since you came here, was there any situation where you felt that you did not belong, or that you were discriminated against?

Marija: I would not say discriminated. I do not think I have ever felt like that. But not belonging, not being able to participate, or being an outsider — I definitely felt that at school. Not because people were trying to make me an outsider, but because I was not really willing to engage.

I started Austrian school in tenth grade, so the people had already been together for years. They already had their own friend groups, and I just started school with them. Obviously, I would have had to make friends and become part of already established friend circles. They did try to become friends with me, but I feel like I was not doing enough on my part. I am really introverted, and I was keeping to myself.

At university, my experience is that it is really hard to make friends here. It was okay when I was studying Sociology because I feel like everyone was kind of on their own, and it was easier to talk to people because everyone was on their own. But in Psychology, I feel like everybody already knows each other. Every time I go to a lecture or seminar, people are talking to each other because they know each other. Maybe because of the preparation for the entrance exam or something. But in my experience, it is really hard to make friends at university here. I have not successfully managed to do that. But I also feel like maybe I am not trying hard enough to make friends.

Interviewer: Can you say something about the bureaucracy processes which you experienced here?

Marija: There is some bureaucracy stuff to go through. But compared to a lot of people I know who moved to Austria later than I did, I think I had it much easier and smoother. Also compared to other countries that I have heard of. Italy is even worse, from what I have heard.

I have not really had bad experiences. Waiting for the visa is annoying, and sometimes you think: why can it not work faster? Then you have to keep contacting them, and they do not always answer. So it is annoying, but I have kind of gotten used to it.

Recently, I switched from the student visa. I was on the student visa for the past ten years, I would say. Before that I had a school residence permit, and then I was on the student visa. Since November, I have the Red-White-Red Card. That went quite smoothly, I must say, which made me happy. I expected much worse.

I know a lot of Russian people who moved from Russia, and it has been much harder for them since the start of the war because they do extra background checks, for example with banks and stuff. I have not really had that experience there. They started doing it with me as well, but I have not had it as badly.

They check extra hard if you are from Russia. Before, they never asked for some things when I renewed my visa, but then they started doing it a couple of years ago. I have also heard of cases of people not being able to open a bank account if they are from Russia. So in 2015, it was definitely much easier.

The hardest part about the whole thing is that if you are on a student visa and you cannot work because you have not found a job for some reason, you have to have a lot of money in your

bank account. That is definitely the hardest part.

Interviewer: Now we will switch to the third section of questions. Can you say something about the digital platforms and social networks which you have been using since you came here? What kind of networks are you using, what kind of content are you following, especially content related to Vienna, Austria, or the host country society?

Marija: Before I came here, I was not really actively using the internet, even though I was 14 or 15 at that time. I mostly used the Russian Facebook. Then when I came here, I opened an Instagram page. I did not have one before because, as I said, I was at an international school for the first year. Nobody had the Russian Facebook. It was actually blocked in my school. So I had to find other ways to communicate with people.

I think I did not even have WhatsApp before. So I opened WhatsApp and Instagram. I started using YouTube. I was not really using it before I came to Austria. Snapchat was also a thing back then, and I used Snapchat a lot.

Interviewer: When you came here, what kind of content did you follow related to Austria? What Instagram pages or content did you follow?

Marija: There were definitely lifestyle influencers from Vienna. Interestingly enough, they were mostly Russian-speaking people from former Soviet countries or English-speaking people. I was not really consuming content in German in the first years because my German was not good enough.

Right now, I would say lifestyle influencers in all languages, honestly — German, Russian, and English. Also Vienna influencers, people who recommend places to go and things to do. They do it in both languages, English and German, but mostly English.

Interviewer: What was your feeling about following this kind of content? Did it help you belong more here or feel more relaxed about life here?

Marija: Yes, I feel like it definitely helps a lot. I spend a lot of time inside the house. I do not really go out. I am really introverted, so I do not have a lot of friends, and it is hard for me to make friends.

Looking at other people's lives is definitely nice. Seeing how other people live their lives here helps. It is a bit like romanticizing life in Vienna, because it can get really dull if you are in the same routine. It really helps to look at other people's vlogs because they make everything extra nice and pretty. It brings you back to the feeling: oh, it is a nice place to live. I enjoy looking at how other people live their lives.

Interviewer: Can we make a little conclusion about what role digital tools and this kind of content play in helping you feel more belonging to this place? Can you explain the feeling and make a link between the content you follow and belonging to this place?

Marija: I feel like it is nice to see different people of different backgrounds, languages, nations, social situations and life situations, all living in the same place. It is really nice to see that you do not have to be a very specific type of person to be able to live your life successfully somewhere.

It is also nice when you see a familiar place or a familiar situation that you are sometimes in. You can think: "Oh, I know that place where the person is walking," or "I also like that café." I like that.

I do not really follow any comedy influencers, but I feel like understanding humor is a very high level of knowing a foreign language. Every time I have comedy content on my feed, and I do not have to think and translate things in my mind, it feels nice. If I understand memes or any type of humor content in German, it really makes me feel better. It is like: not only do you understand the language, but you also understand the cultural part of the humor. That really helps with the feeling of belonging. Comedy is also culture.

Interviewer: How would you feel if someone talks with you in dialect? Is there a difference between seeing dialect online and hearing it in real life?

Marija: It does help. At work, I have a lot of people from Austria who speak different dialects. I have definitely gotten better at understanding it. The dialect itself, I obviously do not understand all the words. But the good thing about seeing stuff on social media is that a lot of people who also do not know German, or do not know German well enough to understand the dialect, ask in the comments: "What does this word mean?" or "I do not understand, can you write it out?" And there are always answers.

So if I do not understand something on social media, I just go into the comments, and there will definitely be someone who explains the whole social background. I still feel like I do not understand everything 100%, especially dialect, because there is no way you understand words if you have never heard them before.

But it feels very nice when you see something, especially in dialect, and you understand it. I used to be scared of dialect, and I used to find it ugly, because when I was learning German, I was learning Hochdeutsch, and it was all from German books. In Russia, they obviously do not have Austrian German language-learning tools and books.

But now I think it is kind of nice. All the Austrian memes about hating Germany, I also find them funny at this point. I even find Austrian dialect better than German dialect now. It is nice in that sense. It definitely helps with belonging.

I like humor a lot. I watch a lot of humor content. I feel like Russia has a very big humor industry, a comedy industry. I do not really know how to explain it, but there are a lot of comedy shows in Russia. So I really like humor stuff. That is why I mentioned it. I just like comedy stuff.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you, Marija.