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Research Training Group

**Transnational Social Support**

- Programme -

# Research Training Group “Transnational Social Support”

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## 1. What are Research Training Groups?

A Research Training Group is a university graduate training program established at a center of scientific excellence in a specific field. It is designed for 15-25 PhD students by 8-15 faculty members of a single university or, in few cases, a small group of universities. The students work on their theses within the framework of a coherent and often interdisciplinary research programme; they participate in an accompanying study programme designed by the faculty members.

Research Training Groups aim at providing especially qualified doctoral students with an opportunity to produce their doctoral theses within a highly qualified and collaborative research environment.

Measures to achieve this aim include:

- Integration of dissertations into a comprehensive, outstanding research programme
- Active involvement of doctoral students in a structured accompanying study programme
- Establishing transparent and innovative mentoring structures
- Incentives to encourage mobility and networking in the international scientific community

These elements will be applied in such a way as to enable doctoral students to gain early independence in research.

## 2. RTG "Transnational Social Support": Research Programme

The following pages will provide a description of the Research Training Group's (RTG) research programme. The doctoral thesis topics proposed below are to be regarded as examples of potential projects. We also encourage applicants to provide a presentation of their own research interests in the synopses accompanying the scholarship application.

### 2.1 Summary

In view of global developments, the future challenges faced by social support systems can no longer be met by relationships and structures of support that are limited to individual nations or societies. This is why the Research Training Group, funded by the German Research Foundation, will conduct empirical research on *Transnational Social Support*. In existing research on social support, transnational constellations have received very little scholarly attention.

The Research Training Group will concentrate on challenges and processes of support in the context of transmigration as well as the framing and initiation of social support by transnational organisations. These research fields are to be explored with respect to three primary research areas: "Transnational Family Care", "Transnational Networks", and "Transnational Professional Support". Following the research on social support, these research areas are to be studied with respect to social processes and constellations that foster people's agency.

### 2.2 Social Support

By focusing on transnational social support, the RTG builds on the research on social support and transnationality that has increasingly become a topic of international academic debate in different disciplines over the last 25 years.

Social support means – in general terms – "the mechanisms through which a social environment protects its individual members from threatening and impairing events and experiences, and which, in case the latter come to pass and take their course, can support them in their coping efforts." (Nestmann 2001, p. 1687). Social support encompasses measures, interventions and social relationships that help ease burdensome and impairing life events,

situations or trajectories. Even when actors are not confronted by burdensome life events, social support can play a preventive role in promoting human well-being and welfare and by preventing problems from arising in the first place.

From the beginning, research on social support has focused on human relationships and social integration and has explored their positive impact on coping with and preventing burdensome and impairing life events and life trajectories. T

The concept of the social network is of vital importance to research on social support. As an intermediate structure between the micro-level of human relationships and the macro-level of social structures and processes, it allows for identifying both the influence of closer and wider relationships on one's personal development and individual experiences and behaviour, and, vice versa, the influence of individuals on these closer and wider relationships. The network concept also refers to the dynamics of social relationships and bonds. Given the influence of changing situations and social structures, social relationships of the individual person will not remain unchanged but - over time and in new constellations – need to be re-built, actively negotiated and solidified again and again. Consequently, individuals are considered as agents with the result that the active part in dealing with the social world and its appropriation and design come into view.

Within research on social support, the perspective of the actor is also discussed by studying the social phenomenon of agency. Agency is the “realized capacity of people to act upon their world and not only to know about or give personal intersubjective significance to it. That capacity is the power of people to act purposively and reflectively, in more or less complex interrelationships with one another, to reiterate and remake the world in which they live, circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable” (Holland et al. 1998, S. 42). According to this definition, agency does not entail individual characteristics of the actors' capacity to act. On the contrary, it is essential for social theories analyzing agency to focus on social processes that strengthen people's agency. (cf. Weltentwicklungsbericht 2006). Therefore, research on social support also needs to pay attention to social constellations, social networks and transitional constellations as well as general social processes that foster agency and situate them in social and political contexts. In doing so, the analysis will not only refer to coping with individual challenges but will also emphasize the structural, organisational and legal parameters that facilitate or limit people's agency (cf. Homfeldt/Schweppe/Schröer 2006).

### **2.3 Transnational Social Support**

Central to research on transnationality are new forms of compressing time and space that have emerged against the background of growing globalisation, new developments in information technology and new modes of transportation. This includes new forms of mobility and migration (transmigration), but also new forms of international political, social and economic cooperation (transnational organisations).

Transnationality<sup>1</sup> is characterized by the circulation of people, goods, money, symbols, ideas, and cultural practices. In this process, new structural patterns emerge in terms of biography, space and institutions. Transnational structural patterns are based on feelings of belonging, common ideas and beliefs, the inextricability of economic, political, cultural and social factors, on connections in the labour force as well as on relationships of dominance and their related organizational structures that transcend the borders of nation states (cf. Pries 1998, 2002). Pries assumes that there is a basic understanding of transnationality shared by many people. “In an expansive understanding of the concept, *transnationalism* refers to the sense of belonging, cultural commonalities, intertwined forms of communication, workplace contexts and everyday life practice, as well as to related social orders and regulations that transcend the

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<sup>1</sup> Internationality, by contrast, designates the relations between states, in which the states present themselves as sovereign actors (according to international law) (cf. Kaelble/Kirsch/Schmidt-Gernig 2002). From an international perspective, the national unity of the corresponding countries will therefore remain in the foreground as a systematic reference.

borders of nation states. A narrow understanding of the concept of *transnationalism* only refers to very lasting, extensive and structured or institutionalized relationships that exist in different places in different countries and that transcend national borders" (Pries 2002, p. 3). Therefore transnationality may be understood as a new context for social intertwining (Elias 1986), referring to the micro-level of social reality -- the social positions and positioning of actors along with their everyday life practice, lifestyles, and biographical projects and identities -- as well as to the macro-level -- the social and political framework.

In the context of existing research on transnationalisation, systematic research of social support focusing on people's agency has only been pursued by a limited number of studies. It is this research desideratum that the Research Training Group wants to address. In doing so, the RTG will seek to ascertain, from the perspective of social support, whether people's agency is strengthened in these social contexts and whether corresponding effects, like those proven for support contexts, can be found here as well. Taking the actors as the starting point, transnational social support can be understood as a social process of appropriating and designing social worlds across national borders, in which support activities are performed in either direct or indirect ways.

## **2.4 Transmigration and Transnational Organisations**

The Research Training Group will focus on two areas of transnationality research: *Transmigration* and *Transnational Organisations*. The study of social support processes will be approached from the perspective of everyday practices and processes of action that occur within the context of transmigration. Research on transnational organisations, on the other hand, will concentrate in particular on organisational processes and the parameters of social support.

### **2.4.1 Transmigration**

The concept of transmigration was introduced into migration research as a critical response to the dominant conceptualisation of migration as a movement into one direction – that is, from the home country to the receiving country – and the implicit model of the (more or less reluctant) integration and adaptation of migrants in the receiving countries (cf. Glick Schiller 1992; Basch/Glick Schiller/Blanc-Szanton 1994). Glick Schiller/Levitt (2003) assume that migration research has so far been characterized by binary concepts (for instance: home country/receiving country, citizen/non-citizen, acculturation/cultural insistence) because it made nation states a natural unit of research and equated society with national society. By basing its work on new forms of demarcation cutting across regions of origin and arrival, research on transmigration takes into view (new) forms and ideas of self-ascertainment and of viewing the world, cultural and social orientations, work strategies, affiliations and social positionings of people. These are multiple because they are not based upon referential systems that are more or less closed (the society of origin *or* the society of arrival) but take on elements of the regions of origin *and* arrival.

Transmigration is described as a process „by which immigrants build social fields that link together their countries of origin and their country of settlement“ (Glick Schiller et al 1992, S. 10). Transmigrants act, make decisions, care for one another, and identify themselves within networks tying them to two or more societies at the same time (cf. Faist 1998, 2000a,b). In this process, the physical circularity of transborder movements and bonds is not a necessary condition for their emergence, development, and maintenance. In fact, transborder relations can also express themselves as symbolic bonds.

Transmigration research is very much based on agent and agency-centered approaches and devoted to the emergence of transnational social formations and communities. Consequently, addressing relationship networks in everyday life and in the transborder interactions of subjects and groups of actors “from below” represents a specific development within transmigration research. Now a broad range of empirical studies are available that demonstrate the ways in which transmigration may be understood as an everyday transborder context of interaction and as a strategy for life (or survival) as well as a social world that is experienced, anchored and

lived in everyday life (cf. Smith/ Guarnizo 1998; Portes 1999, among others). This research indicates that corresponding attention should be paid to the fact that identity concepts are subject to differentiation by hybrid or multiple as-well-as-identities (cf. Mecheril/ Teo1994; Mecheril 2003) and that biography concepts are subject to differentiation by transnational life trajectories (Apitzsch 2003; Apitzsch/Siouti 2007).

Existing research has pointed to the significance of the contextual dependency of transmigration (cf. Pries 1998; Vertovec 2001, among others). The corresponding specific context of transmigration is constituted in the process of a complex interplay between the region(s) of origin and the region(s) of arrival and influences the emergence and the design of transmigrational processes, which in turn produce specific consequences for both the region(s) of arrival and the region(s) of origin (cf. Levitt 2001) and may have varying implications for the agency of the involved actors.

#### **2.4.2 Transnational Organisations**

During the last twenty years there has been increasing attention devoted to transnational organisations that frame and provide processes of social support and aid (cf. Beisenherz 2000). Transnational organisations acting in this context can be differentiated into four groups:

- Transnational organisations operating at a global level in the context of or commissioned by, for instance, the European Union, the United Nations, or other transstate alliances for the political and social regulation of international challenges;
- Welfare organisations, foundations, and non-governmental organisations that are active at a transnational level for religious, political or moral reasons;
- Transnational consulting companies offering their services on the transnational market for social services;
- Transnational grassroots organisations or movements set up by (local) civil society actors.

Overall, transnational organisations increasingly produce knowledge and shape social and political developments that in turn have an impact upon the design of local and/or transnational support contexts. From the perspective of neo-institutional theories they are currently being discussed mainly in terms of global governance. Like the concept of global civil society, the concept of global governance is an equivocal one. Governance means the control of social relations through permanent regulations (cf. Zürn 2006, p. 126 ff.) providing – in the case of good governance – for a cushion to mitigate the consequences of globalisation. At the same time, global governance is understood to be an analytical concept “encompassing the entire arrangement of different forms of control at different levels of decision making” (Zürn 2006, p. 127). With respect to governing at a transnational level, global governance means “that social groups largely establish their own regulations transnationally to avoid undesired results of interaction” (Zürn 2006, p. 127).

Kern has worked out three types of global governance that may occur simultaneously and complement each other. “Global governance by (1) international and intergovernmental cooperation, (2) global political networks, and (3) transnational network organisations. The first type is meant to cope with cross-border problems (...) that individual countries cannot solve on their own by international and intergovernmental cooperation. (...) Secondly, global political networks have emerged within the last few years that have both governmental and global social actors as members”. The third type involves forms of transnational “self-organisation without the participation of nation states” (Kern 2004, p. 287).

The discussion pertaining to transnational organisations has pointed out that they do not represent a kind of “co-government” in terms of a linear logic of interventions and measures, but depend on network strategies, particularly when framing support processes; from the perspective of global governance, transnational organisations serve as intermediate and networking units between the actors. In this respect, networking does not only mean a process of coordinating organisations and institutions, but also an intermediary form of action in the regional and transnational context. Networks comprising transnational support organisations do not only represent the infrastructure for exchange, communication, and decision processes

between individuals, groups and organisations, but also exert influence over political and social orientations and options for action through their networking structures and relationships.

By doing this they seek – at least if we follow their frequently expressed self-legitimation - to strengthen the agency of the participating actors. For instance, transnational organisations often explain their forms of social support and interventions as being informed by notions of empowerment or self-help. Other arguments are that they take up conceptions of action of local grassroots movements (cf. Sherraden/Ninacs 1998, McCall 2003) or foster the participation of actors in social and civil society development (cf. Goetze 2002).

By contrast, other authors follow Foucault’s approach of criticising domination and point to the fact that by focussing on agency, scholars would produce and reproduce precisely those norms – autonomy, self-determination, participation – through which the new governance was structuring itself. The “seemingly insignificant and ordinary mechanisms that seem to enable governance” were established through “technologies of agency” (Miller/Rose 1994, p. 64). Dean (1998) adds that technologies of agency are especially deployed at times when individuals, groups or communities become “targeted populations”.

In this context, hopes are being considered very carefully that have (had) been placed on a “global civil society” (cf. Kaelble/Kirsch/Schmidt-Gernig 2002) and on transnational non-governmental organisations (TNGO). It is true that TNGOs are still considered capable of providing considerable momentum in putting a human face on globalisation (Hofmann 2006, p. 279), but so far no common perspective regarding a global civil society is to be seen (“clash of definitions”). Furthermore, the growing linkage between TNGOs and other actors such as nation states and confederations of nation states (like the United Nations) is becoming subject to critical scrutiny (cf. Frantz/Martens 2006, p. 86), and the north-south divide with respect to the distribution of influence, power, resources and staff in the TNGO sector is being emphasized.

## 2.5 Research Areas

In contrast to existing research on transnationalisation, in which transmigration and transnational organisations are mostly regarded separately, the simultaneous investigation of both fields will allow us to view the heterogeneous challenges faced by transnational social support in conjunction instead of only single aspects such as the network structures and self-help potential of transmigrants that dominate the prevailing discussions about social support.

The following chart illustrates the research areas. Transnational social support is to be analysed from three perspectives: *Transnational Family Care*, *Transnational Networks* und *Transnational Professional Support*. These areas fit into the structure of existing research on support that distinguishes between spontaneous and natural support systems (e.g. family), intermediate (e.g. local communities), and professional social support (see, among others, Caplan 1974, 1976; Nestmann 2001; Otto/Bauer 2005). In turn, the three research areas are each subdivided into two focuses in which corresponding topics are to be studied from the perspective of transmigration on the one hand and from the standpoint of transnational organisations on the other hand. Dissertation topics (intended to serve as examples) are to be found in the description of the research areas and focuses following below.

Transnational Social Support				
Transnationalisation of Social Support	<i>Research Topic</i>	<i>Research Areas</i>	<i>Research Focuses</i>	
	Transmigration			Transnationalisation of family social support
			Transnational Family Care	
				Care policies of transnational organisations
	Social Support			Everyday support effects of transnational networks
			Transnational Networks	

			Transnational networks and social development
			Transnational challenges for local social services
	Transnational Organisations	Transnational Professional Support	
			Professional concepts of social support by transnational organisations

### **2.5.1 Transnational Family Care**

Social support in the context of family relationships has been and still is a key issue for research on social support. One main reason for this is the unique quantitative and qualitative dimension of family and kin support stemming from their solidarity commitments and norms of mutual assistance and support. In numerous studies family and kin have turned out to be reliable, important and constant sources of support (cf. e. g. Pierce/Sarason/Sarason 1996). They effectively protect their members from harm to their well-being and contribute considerably to coping with crises. However, family social support can also result in considerable strain (cf. e. g., Laireiter/Lettner 1993).

Family social support has thus far hardly been studied within the context of transnational forms and processes of support. Since the end of the 1990s, however, research on care has pointed to the growing transnationalisation of family assistance, nursing, and care relationships. One example is the increasing transfer of assistance, nursing, and care services – mostly performed by women – from poor countries into the households of rich countries (see e.g. Anderson 2000; Chang/Ling 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Salazar Parreñas 2001a,b; Lutz 2002a,b, 2003; Ehrenreich/Hochschild 2003; Parella 2003; Reynolds/Zontini 2006). This phenomenon occurs at a global level.

The “new maid issue” can be explained by the changed need for care, upbringing and nursing of private households mainly in rich countries that is caused by changes in family structures, the increasing workforce participation of women, the growing need for care and nursing of the elderly as well as the ongoing privatisation process of the public care system (cf. Geissler 2002). To cope with and meet this demand, families increasingly resort to support outside of the family or delegate care, nursing, and upbringing tasks to paid labour. Here, household workers with a migration background play an important role as they, unlike native workers in many cases, are more prepared to accept the poorly paid, insecure jobs and precarious working conditions that characterize this sector.

By using the concept of “global care chains” - “a series of personal links between people across the globe based on paid or unpaid work of caring” (Hochschild 2000, p. 131) – existing research has pointed out that the phenomenon of the „new maids“ does by no means only imply a one-way-process from poorer to richer countries, but instead that it goes hand-in-hand with the concatenation of care between the countries of origin and the countries of arrival. For instance, the term of transnational motherhood has been coined with respect to the children of the “new maids” who remain in their home countries (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo/Avila 1997). While daily care and upbringing is usually performed by “replacement mothers” – paid workers or relatives or acquaintances – the biological mother does not withdraw from these tasks altogether, but will often intervene, for instance by using modern forms of telecommunication, across the distance (cf. Salazar Parreñas 2001b; Bernhard/Landolt/ Goldring 2005).

Secondly, apart from the “new maid issue”, the findings of transnational family research have important implications for the understanding of transnational forms of family social support. These findings have indicated that transnational families also maintain multi-layered relationships and develop transborder forms of social support (cf. e. g. Goulbourne/Chamberlain 2001; Herrera Lima 2001; Bryceson/Vuorela 2002; de la Hoz 2004; Pribilsky 2004). In this context, research has especially demonstrated the enormous and rapidly growing financial

transfers from migrants to family members in their home region(s) (Global Commission 2005, p. 26).<sup>2</sup>

Overall, research to date has mainly focused on the positive impact of transnational care practices. In doing so, it runs the risk of losing sight of their burdensome, restrictive and negative consequences. For instance, the “new maids” are often positively referred to as “agents of change” but without systematically investigating the question of how the often precarious working conditions – poor pay, long working hours, few holidays as well as illegal status and consequently limited access to social safety systems – affect the development of their agency. (cf. Brückner 2007). Further, research has revealed that transnational work of women is hardly ever accompanied by a change in the part that men play in the families left behind. Hence it is the women who – now from abroad – continue to organise issues of child care and education. The findings with respect to the financial transfers effected by migrants, mentioned above, are also ambiguous. It is pointed out, for instance, that individual families as well as whole regions are in danger of developing relationships of dependency (cf. Itzigsohn 2000; Portes 2003). Different studies have revealed to some extent considerable social and economic differences between families receiving material transfers and those that do not (cf. e. g. Goldring 2002; Lopez Cordova 2005).

Although research on transnationalisation has often invoked the transnationalisation of family social support, it has hardly been made the object of systematic research.

Additionally, the ways in which *Transnational Family Care* is framed by care policies of transnational organisations has barely been studied. Transnational family care policies are of increasing importance due to the growing transnational character of care (see above, and Brückner 2007; Tronto 2007). This involves questions regarding the relationship between public and private care activities and responsibilities (cf. Hochschild 1995) as well as the need to guarantee social civil rights (“social citizenship”) for individuals providing care. The demand is thus made for affording the same kind of recognition to caring occupations to which other types of gainful employment are privy (see Knijn/Kremer 1997). In this context, Tronto (2005) points out that transnational migration policies have clear connotations for gender politics. The recent debate, for instance, only focused on economic resources along the lines of the classical sectors of gainful employment, and the conditions for obtaining citizenship were almost exclusively defined by these criteria as well. By contrast, caring as a type of occupation that ensures social life did not result in ensuring one’s residence status or in obtaining citizenship. Granting social citizenship to provide security for those engaged in caring activities would constitute a shift in prevailing understandings of the relationship between gender and democracy, since it would afford unlimited access to both public and private spheres for both genders and thus critically question existing ascriptions of gendered characteristics to social domains (cf. Brückner 2007).

The research area *Transnational Family Care* is correspondingly divided into two research focuses. First, *Transnational Family Care* will be studied from the perspective of transmigrants’ everyday family support practices. Second, care policies of transnational organisations will be analysed.

### **2.5.2 Transnational Networks**

This research area will explore forms and processes of social support developing in the context of transnational networks. Research will be primarily devoted to transnational communities and self-organisations of transmigrants. They have typically emerged on the basis of specific social, cultural, political and/or economic interests and motivations, common regional and/or national

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<sup>2</sup> In Latin America and the Caribbean more than 20 million families benefit from these remittances, which often provide half of their income or more (UN Expert Group 2005). For families, mainly in developing countries, these remittances constitute a source of support, if not the central one, to ensure that basic needs such as food and housing can be met, that family members can have access to improved educational and vocational training opportunities and that they can improve their work situation – i.e. by setting up small companies - or provide security against financial risks (UN Expert Group 2005).

origin or common values or ideologies and by the transnational activities of their actors. According to Faist (2000c), these transnational networks can be distinguished into two groups: first, there are networks characterised by the circulation of people, goods and/or information involving two or more countries that are founded on the principle of exchange and/or instrumental reciprocity. Second, there are networks in which people in the region(s) of arrival and the region(s) of origin are connected more or less permanently by strong and complex social and symbolic bonds and have developed, based on principles of solidarity, a high degree of social cohesion or a common repertoire of symbolic and collective representation. In this context it must be noted that in the existing research there is no selective demarcation between the concepts of transnational communities and self-organisations of transmigrants. However, they can be distinguished from networks developing on the basis of primary frames of reference such as family and kin (research focus 1) and, with regard to social support processes and performances, are based on the related normative solidarity commitments and norms of mutual assistance and support of the family.

The analysis of social networks encompasses, on the one hand, a number of quite elaborate techniques for exploring relationships between actors. On the other hand, it also entails the concrete, theoretical-empirical analysis of human action, its decisive factors and consequences. The central question is how the patterns of relationships between actors influence their agency. According to empirical studies, social networks make resources available to actors, organise collectives and empower them to act or limit their agency (see, among others, Frey 2004). The question remains unanswered, however, how far the social support provided by transnational networks goes hand-in-hand with strengthening the actors' agency. Consequently, we will focus on how forms of social support are developed in transnational communities and self-organisations of transmigrants and what significance they have for the agency of the involved actors.

On the one hand, attention will be paid to the consequences of social support for the actors within these transnational networks. On the other hand, the forms of support initiated by transnational networks are to be studied. Existing research has so far mainly pointed to the social and economic achievements of transnational communities and organisations of transmigrants for their countries of origin. The Global Commission for Migration (Global Commission 2005) explicitly emphasizes the considerable potential for development of migrant self-organisations with respect to their countries of origin.

Although research on this topic as a whole is still in a nascent stage, researchers in the United States have also highlighted the social initiatives of transnational communities and organisations of transmigrants mainly with regard to their region(s) of origin. In their pioneering study – the first large-scale comparative survey of self-organisations of Latin American transmigrants in the US - Portes and others have found out that 54% of the organisations they studied provide support to their home countries for schools and education, 40% in the field of health care and 30% for children and the elderly, either in the form of money, technical equipment, materials, volunteer work or in the form of specific skills. Other studies additionally provide evidence for activities that improve the situation of women and the recognition of human rights or rebuild infrastructure and offer support in case of natural disasters in the home countries (cf. Orozco 2004).

Regarding the well-developed transnational space between the US and Latin America, which has been studied quite extensively, there is evidence that these networks organising social support are far from being isolated phenomena.<sup>3</sup> They have therefore become the object of private and public programmes - at the national level of the countries of origin and the countries of arrival as well as at an international level - to promote this transnational potential for

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<sup>3</sup> In 2002, there were approximately 100 Mexican transmigrant organisations in the city of Chicago alone (Orozco 2004).

development.<sup>4</sup> Hence the networks of transmigrants are being embedded in a wide net of political and social actors, with the question remaining unanswered to what extent this process will affect their profile as autonomous self-organisations.

Some ambiguous findings are also becoming apparent in this context, however. Levitt (2001) points to the sometimes different interests and expectations of the donor migrants and those in the region(s) of origin who receive assistance and support. These differing interests are often weighted in favour of the former, especially because they are supported by government or party representatives who give more attention to them - due to their role as "major donors" - than to those living permanently in the region of origin. Also, given the sometimes quite considerable contributions to the region(s) of origin, some fear that governments might withdraw their support or at least not change existing development strategies in the countries of origin.

Hence there are research findings indicating manifold social initiatives of transnational networks for social development. However, these findings are mainly limited to the region between the US and Latin America and, furthermore, they have not been studied much from the perspective of the involved actors' agency. Therefore, on the one hand, it is the consequences of support initiatives mediated by transnational transmigrant networks for the actors involved in these networks that will be investigated in the research area *Transnational Networks*. On the other hand, social initiatives and forms of support organised by these networks and implemented for social development will also be subjected to analytical scrutiny.

The research area is consequently divided into two focuses: "*Everyday support effects of transnational networks*" and "*Transnational networks and social development*".

### **2.5.3 Transnational Professional Support**

This research area will analyse the ways in which, professional support also accompany, promote or even initiate processes of social support. Until now, there has been little systematic research on professional forms of assistance in the context of transnational support. They are to be analysed in this research area from two perspectives.

On the one hand, local social services will be studied with respect to the transnationalisation of the challenges with which they are confronted. In the context of transnational processes, local social services are of major significance, since a need for social support caused by problematic, restrictive or burdensome consequences of transnational support processes becomes manifest "locally". These include, for instance, the precarious working and living conditions of domestic servants in private households – some of them underage (cf. Jurt 2005).

This represents a special challenge to social services, since they have mostly developed within national societies and welfare states. It is true that social services have responded in many ways to migration processes and the life situation of migrants. Concepts of inter-cultural education were developed. However, these concepts are mostly based on concepts of *one* society defined along national lines (cf. Liebau 2007) and sometimes they do not correspond to the life practices of transmigrants. At the same time, a gradual broadening of perspectives can be discerned. For instance, concepts of diversity are incorporated into social services in order to cope with the forms of living and life practices of transmigrants (cf. Leiprecht/Vogel 2007; Sakamoto 2007). Consequently, this research focus will explore the organisational structures, the conceptual foundations and the activities of professionals in social services that have been developed with respect to the social support of transmigrants.

Additionally, professional concepts for social support in the context of transnational organisations (Gerstner et al. 2006) will be studied.

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<sup>4</sup> Examples include: government programmes of the countries of origin (e.g. Mexico, El Salvador) to counterfinance social projects or to strengthen communities or organisations in the countries of arrival (Goldring 2002) as well as counterfinance programmes by national (e.g. US-Aid) or international (United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development) institutions of development aid or private foundations (e.g. Rockefeller Foundation).

Transnational organisations often justify their forms of social support and interventions by approaches generally aimed at strengthening the agency of the actors involved. The relevant literature alludes to lobbying, advocacy and efforts to promote empowerment. At the same time, scholars also call for the promotion of civil society and responsible social structures and the augmentation of human and social capital. There is a broad consensus that this cannot be attained by securing the basic rights of formal citizenship alone, but that people need to have social entitlements at their disposal along with cultural, political, and material resources, and that their capacity for agency should be fostered (cf. Novy/Schröer 2006) so that they can make use of their rights (cf. Goetze 2002; Sen 2002; Kesselring 2006). These recommendations are often included in perspectives of a so-called social development “from below” (Novy 2007, S. 37).

Although concepts of social support are repeatedly invoked in the literature and are primarily discussed with regard to people’s agency, professional concepts of social support in transnational organisations have hardly ever been made the subject of an empirical analysis. To rectify this lacuna in the existing research, these concepts are to be studied with respect to their theoretical foundations, goals, practical procedures and the understanding of their actors.

This research area will thus concentrate on two focuses: *Transnational challenges for local social services* and *Professional concepts of social support for transnational organisations*.

## **2.6 Integration of Postdoctoral Students into the Research Programme**

Transnational research is in a nascent stage with respect to methodology and methods. This is especially true for the very young research field of transnational social support. However, some methodological and methodical guidelines can be derived from existing transnational research, since this research yields important insights for research on transnational support as well. In this respect the discussion of “methodological nationalism” in the context of transnational research is of particular relevance. “Methodological nationalism is the naturalization of nation states by the social sciences. Scholars have shared that national borders are the natural unit of study, equate society with nature state, and conflate national interest with the purpose of social sciences” (Wimmer/Glick Schiller 2002, S. 302). This observation sheds light on the fact that orienting research towards national societies impedes, prevents or distorts the identification and comprehension of transnational processes, since transborder processes and the simultaneous connections with two or more societies do not come into view. It is therefore an essential precondition for transnational research to develop research strategies that encompass the intersection *between* two or more societies generating knowledge and action in transnational contexts.

Multi-sited ethnography can be seen as a solution for analysing these simultaneous connections. To this end, Marcus has presented a proposal for transnational research. This research approach includes: „(...) tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activities (...) (through methods) designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations” (Marcus 1995, p. 96 ff.). Marcus advocates methodical approaches for “tracing” people (mainly migrants), things (money, goods, artwork, intellectual property), metaphors (symbols, images), individual biographies or social and political conflicts that have become publicly known.

We do not seek to call into question the benefits of “multi-sited” approaches for transnational research. Nevertheless, since transnationality is anchored in everyday life, it must be noted that transnational processes can also become manifest and be studied at a single location. The term “location” does not need to be applied only to geographical units in this context. According to Apitzsch (2003), transnational biographies, for instance, are locations of transnational space and can become the means for accessing invisible, yet objective, structures of transnational spaces of migration.

Given these preliminary considerations, research on transnational social support will have to review, develop, or newly design its methodical approaches in such a way that they aim at the

intersection *between* two or more societies generating the forms and processes of social support in transnational contexts.

To support the RTG's goals, postdoctoral students will be integrated into the research project so that they can explore suitable methodological approaches for the study of transnational support. Scholarships will be granted to postdoctoral students who seek to acquire further qualification in this area.

### **3. Study Programme**

The Research Training Group is embedded in a study programme, the central goal of which is to support doctoral theses of outstanding quality to merit international acclaim. The basis for qualification is oriented according to interdisciplinary and international criteria.

Guest scholars from Germany and abroad will be substantially integrated into the qualification programme so as to allow scholars to establish contacts with the international academic community at an early stage. Conducting research abroad and doing internships in transnational organisations are also key components for qualification. Scholars will also be encouraged to participate and deliver lectures in conferences abroad dealing with the subject of the RTG.

The study programme is offered in modules and comprises 60 CPs in total. The structure includes 5 modules:

*Module 1: The theoretical basis and status of the research on transnational social support*

*Module 2: Methodology and methods for research on transnational social support*

*Module 3: Mentoring and guidance during the doctoral process*

*Module 4: Research abroad*

*Module 5: Academic key qualifications*

### **4. Participating Scholars**

The Research Training Group is located at two sites: the University of Hildesheim Foundation (Faculty of Education and Social Sciences) and the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz (Institute of Social Work and Education).

#### *Coordinators*

- Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Schröer, University of Hildesheim
- Prof. Dr. Cornelia Schweppe, University of Mainz

#### *University professors*

- Prof. Dr. Detlef Garz, Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Education
- Prof. Dr. Werner Greve, University of Hildesheim Foundation, Psychology
- Prof. Dr. Franz Hamburger, Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Social Work (Social Work/Social Sciences)
- Prof. Dr. Hans Günther Homfeldt, Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Social Work (Social Work/Social Sciences)
- Prof. Dr. Kirsten Scheiwe, University of Hildesheim Foundation, Law
- Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Schröer, University of Hildesheim Foundation, Social Work (Social Work/Social Sciences)

- Prof. Dr. Cornelia Schweppe, Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Social Work (Social Work/Social Sciences)
- Prof. Dr. Stephan Wolff, University of Hildesheim *Foundation, Sociology, Organizational Pedagogy*

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