1. Introduction

A central issue in the ongoing research on migration is the integration of immigrants and the role of ethnic social networks in employment opportunities of immigrant and ethnic minorities.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how ethnic niches of immigrants affected their integration.

More specifically this study examines the following questions:

1. Do immigrants operate within ethnic niches either in the labor market or in private life?
2. What are the factors influencing immigrants’ integration in the host society and the labor market?
3. How does being in an ethnic niche affect immigrants’ integration?

2. The Theoretical Framework

A number of previous studies on immigrants’ integration maintained that the different forms of ethnic concentration were a strategy that immigrants adopted in order to cope with lack of social networks in the host country, with language and skills deficiency and with discrimination (Liebererson, 1981; Model, 1993, 1997; Portes and Manning, 1986; Waldinger, 1996; Zeltzer-Zubida, 2004).
Ethnic concentration of immigrants in the host country’s economy is usually described by the concepts of ethnic niche, ethnic enclave and ethnic economy. Ethnic niche is a concept that describes ethnic division in the labor market, the concept of ethnic enclave relates to ethnic entrepreneurship (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990), and the concept of ethnic economy is a broad concept, which includes all economic activities, in which ethnicity and ethnic concentration play a role, and concerns immigrant ethnic self-employed, employers and employees (Light and Gold, 2000).

This study focuses on the concept of ethnic niche, namely ethnic concentration in the labor market that results in the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in particular occupations or industries (Zeltzer-Zubida, 2004). There are some different approaches to the quantitative bounds of overrepresentation. Waldinger and Bozorgmehr (1996) denoted that an ethnic niche is an occupation or an industry in which an ethnic group is overrepresented by at least 50 percent. Other scholars defined ethnic concentration in the labor market just as simple overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in certain employment sectors (Logan et al., 2000).

Many studies maintained that ethnic networks constitute a source of “social capital” and have a positive role in employment opportunities of immigrant and ethnic communities in host societies (Munshi, 2003; Kahanec and Mendola, 2007). They highlighted the role of community and ethnic networks as a resource for mobilization of start-up capital, information about job opportunities and job training, access to clients and committed labor force (Bailey and Waldinger, 1991; Light and Karageorgis, 1994; Light and Bonacich, 1988; Nee et al., 1994; Perez, 1992; Portes, 1987, 1995; Portes and Stepick, 1993; Stepick, 1989; Waldinger, 1996; Waters, 1994; Zhou, 1992).

Portes and Manning (1986) maintained that the mode of immigrants’ integration was affected by a resilience of ethnic culture, knowledge of host country language, and the general reaction to and attitudes toward the host community. According to Berry et al. (1989), immigrants can adopt four different strategies: assimilation, integration, separation (segregation) and marginalization: (1) Assimilation means replacing the immigrants' original cultural patterns with those of the host society. (2) Integration means that the immigrants both retain their own culture and adopt the host culture. (3) Separation means that the immigrants keep their own cultural patterns, but do not want to
adopt the patterns of the host society. (4) Marginalization means that the immigrants are involved neither in their own culture nor in the culture of the host society.

3. The study

This study specifically examines immigrants’ integration, namely when immigrants retain their ethnic identity and culture, mostly speak their native language and connect with co-ethnic individuals, but also adopt some aspects of the host culture.

Immigrants’ integration in the host society is described by the integration of immigrants in their private life and integration in the labor market. Being in an ethnic niche in private life can be characterized by speaking the host country's language at home, watching TV in it, reading newspapers in it, and sharing co-ethnic friends. Being in an ethnic niche in the labor market can be characterized by the share of co-ethnic colleagues, the share of co-ethnic employers, and using the host country's language professionally.

4. Method

4.1. Data collection

Data were collected in 2006-2007 in Israel. Combining convenient and snowball samples, 321 immigrants from all over Israel were surveyed via a questionnaire. Immigrants from the FSU constitute 85 percent of immigrants who came to Israel in the last wave of immigration after 1989, as well as about 17% of all Israeli population; therefore this study focused on them. The questionnaire was presented in the immigrants’ native language or in Hebrew, according to the respondent’s choice.

4.2. Sample characteristics

47% of the respondents were women and 53% were men. The mean age of immigrants was 40.8, and duration living in Israel was 13.6 years. This corresponded with the national statistical data, indicating that nearly 60% of all immigrants came to Israel in the early 1990’s. The mean income of an immigrant in this sample was about 6000 NIS. This also corresponded with the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, according to which the mean wage of immigrants was about 6163 NIS in 2005.
5. Results

5.1. Ethnic niches of immigrants

The study revealed that the mean share of immigrants’ co-ethnic friends was 80.2%, the share of co-ethnic colleagues was 47.8%, and the share of co-ethnic employers was 26.3%. Since immigrants from the FSU constitute only about 17% of Israeli population and about 20% of the labor force, they were overrepresented among all three groups - friends, colleagues and employers. Hence, immigrants in Israel do create ethnic niches.

A half of the immigrants (48%) never or seldom watched TV in Hebrew, 37% read newspapers in Hebrew less than once a year, and 84.5% spoke their native language at home, all this in spite of the fact that their mean duration of living in Israel was 13.6 years.

Figure 1 shows an emerging grid, in which the share of co-ethnic friends is presented on the x-axis and the share of co-ethnic colleagues is presented on the y-axis. A separating line divides the graph’s area at the 20% level (the share of FSU immigrants in the labor force) into four clusters:

Cluster 1 – both co-ethnic friends and co-ethnic colleagues are underrepresented. These immigrants are not in an ethnic niche neither in the labor market nor in private life;

Cluster 2 - co-ethnic friends are overrepresented and co-ethnic colleagues are underrepresented. These immigrants are in an ethnic niche only in private life, but not in the labor market;

Cluster 3 – co-ethnic friends are underrepresented and co-ethnic colleagues are overrepresented. These immigrants are in an ethnic niche only in the labor market, but not in private life;

Cluster 4 – both co-ethnic friends and co-ethnic colleagues are overrepresented. These immigrants are in an ethnic niche both in private life and the labor market.
The study revealed that about two thirds of the immigrants (62.7%) were in an ethnic niche both in private life and in the labor market, about one third (29.9%) were in an ethnic niche only in private life (29.9%), 4% were in an ethnic niche only in the labor market and only a negligible part (3.4%) were not in an ethnic niche at all.

5.2. Integration of the immigrants

Immigrants were asked about the extent to which they have integrated in the host society and the labor market. Both variables were categorized on a scale of 1 = “did not integrate at all” to 5 = “integrated to a very high extent”. The mean value of integration in the host society was 3.6, and the mean value of integration in the labor market was 3.4. This means that immigrants reported rather high integration in both the host society and the labor market. The study revealed a high correlation between the two kinds of integration (the correlation coefficient is 0.676). Thus, higher integration in the labor market was associated with higher integration in the host society.
5.3. Factors influencing immigrants’ integration

Regression analysis was conducted in order to explore the factors influencing immigrants’ integration in the host society and the labor market. The range of independent variables covered demographic characteristics of immigrants (gender, education, duration living in the host country), their integration in private life (speaking Hebrew at home, watching TV in Hebrew, reading newspapers in Hebrew, share of co-ethnic friends), and their integration in the labor market (share of co-ethnic colleagues, share of co-ethnic employers, speaking professional Hebrew, and income). Both regressions were significant (Sig. = 0.000).

Immigrant women reported higher integration in the host society than men. Duration of living in Israel also positively affected immigrants’ integration in the host society. The salient factors that influenced the immigrants’ integration in the host society related to their incorporation in the labor market: the share of co-ethnic colleagues, speaking professional Hebrew (the most salient factor with the $\beta$-coefficient 0.4) and the household income. The more co-ethnic colleagues an immigrant had, the lower her/his integration in the host society was. The better s/he spoke professional Hebrew and the higher her/his income was, the more was s/he integrated in the host society. The only factor related to private life that influenced the immigrants’ integration was reading a newspaper in Hebrew. This can be explained by the fact that immigrants who read Hebrew newspapers also read job advertisements and so had a higher chance to find better job. The factors influencing the immigrants’ integration in the labor market were only speaking professional Hebrew and household income.

6. Conclusions

1. Immigrants in Israel create ethnic niches in both private life and the labor market.

2. The salient factors that influence the immigrants’ integration in the host society relate to their incorporation in the labor market: the share of co-ethnic colleagues, knowledge of professional Hebrew and household income.
3. The factors influencing the immigrants’ integration in the labor market are also speaking professional Hebrew and household income.

4. Being in an ethnic niche in private life (watching TV in Hebrew, speaking Hebrew at home, the share of co-ethnic friends) does not influence the immigrants’ integration neither in the host society nor in the labor market. But being in an ethnic niche in the labor market does influence immigrants’ integration.

In summary, the study revealed that immigrants who were in ethnic niches in private life perceived themselves as integrated in the host society and the labor market. Immigrants who were in ethnic niches in the labor market perceived themselves as being less integrated.

References


