

# THE ISSUES OF IDENTITY AMONG THE YOUNG ARMENIANS IN THE POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES

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## *Background*

In recent years the discussions concerning problems of the Armenianness have stirred up both in the social sciences and at the level of individual deliberations on the national issues. This discourse is focused on identity, which is closely connected with the visions of organizing and development. The concerns are mostly related to preservation of the Armenian identity, and threats and opportunities in this regard. However, the extent of socio-psychological knowledge about these issues has not expanded proportionally to the growing concerns, thus staying within the scope of simply recording the fact that such problems do exist. Despite attaching importance to the issues of the identity there is no research basis that would allow clarifying the subject of scrutiny per se, i.e. the national identity of the Armenians with its current content, peculiarities of that content and tendencies for different groups of Armenianness. In this context acquiring in-depth information on different strata of the Diaspora, especially about the intrinsic characteristics of the young people becomes a pressing need, without which it is difficult to conceive of forming any joint platform or efficient ways of organizing.

The multilayer character of the Armenianness's problems stems not only from the existence of different communities and their remoteness to Armenia, but also from a number of external, global factors. The problems are not detached from the global developments; they are in the context of these developments and are affected by them. The nature of these developments has caused the identity to be characterized by such notions as change, hybridism and diversity, thus putting it in the supra-national and globalization contexts. This particularly pertains to the collective identities, and especially their diasporan forms [1-3].

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Thus, Armenianness can be viewed as a complex amalgamation of commonalities and differences that cannot be described as a uniform identity with typical and stereotyped characteristics. Not only civilizational, political and cultural geographies of Armenianness vary, but also the problems of these various societies are quite different. Of course, a number of tendencies are common for all the communities (e.g. the assimilation trends, problems of establishing Armenian schools, teaching, speaking and preserving the mother tongue, issues related to the social status in the countries of residence, etc.). It should also be mentioned that apart from problems, these commonalities may also offer resources, which need to be explored.

Two other general observations concerning the issues of national identity and unity of the Armenianness are worth mentioning:

1. On the one hand Armenians widely attribute themselves lack of collectivism and solidarity. Individualism makes the Armenian an energetic, enterprising and adaptive individual; instead it hampers consolidation of the potentials and efficient collective actions. Though this perception is very often unreasonably over-generalized, making it a basis for interpreting any of the Armenianness's problems or making pessimistic forecasts, there is some truth in it which cannot be neglected.
2. On the other hand, the Armenianness has a serious practice and skills of cooperation on a distance, owing to the long experience of living in Diaspora. Networks of social bonds, along with Diaspora's years-long experience of creating imaginary affiliation to the motherland can be considered as a major capability in today's world of supranational processes and network communication. If guided properly, this may become an asset in overcoming the aforementioned "collective laziness," especially given that the modern technologies make it absolutely possible.

Thus, one may refer to a unique synthesis of "grassroots individualism" and "virtual collectivism", where neither factor should be overestimated, as it may affect the quality of the cooperation methodology development.

### ***Common and Differentiating Characteristics of the Armenian Communities in the post-Soviet countries***<sup>1</sup>

The main commonality between the Armenians from the Republic of Armenia (RoA) and post-Soviet countries is the subjective feeling of the Armenian civilizational and cultural affiliation. In addition to this, for the Armenians in the post-

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<sup>1</sup> In this article the notion of *community* will be used not so much in the sense of institution, but rather as a generalized notion for the Armenians in a given country, since very often they are outside the community format as such.

Soviet countries another significant common trait is that they all lived in the former Soviet Union. This factor creates some kind of a shared framework, dictates the models of behavior and thinking, common space of communication, etc. Here the communities are characterized by the influence of the Russian-speaking culture and existence of the Soviet cultural layer in both socio-economic life and socio-psychological nature of the public. Of course, the post-Soviet space is a common platform for the young Armenians in these countries, not necessarily in the sense of a collective memory, but with respect to the communication framework created on that basis and the language. Given the main activity directions and presentation of the objectives by the communities and information sources, almost all post-Soviet diasporan communities have a number of common topics and priorities (ethnic preservation, cultural self-presentation, connection with Armenia, recognition of the Genocide, the NKR issue, etc). Due to these topics they preserve the sense of complicity, the “background” of their Armenian identity at least, though all of this cannot be considered sufficient grounds for a united action.

Communities established outside Armenia already have a number of social and psychological peculiarities due to the fact that they live and act in different cultures; unlike the Armenians who live in Armenia, they exist in a bicultural environment and have at least two objectives:

1. integrate into the social and cultural reality of the country of residence,
2. be identified with the their ethnic group; preserve this identity.

Hence, their goal is either to combine and reconcile their two, sometimes very different identities or to choose between them. Such a unique condition of the migrants' identity has come into the spotlight of the migration, culture and diasporas research and is characterized by such notions as *identity negotiation* and other similar terms [4-6]. Berry (*Berry, 1997*) believes that there are several ways out of the cross-cultural situation. When integration of the two identities or distinct formation of one of them fails, we have a marginal person with a confused identity, “neither this, nor that.” Such person becomes socially and psychologically vulnerable and cannot act efficiently in the name of any of the groups. Another development for the failed combination is assimilation, when for one reason or another, a person chooses not to differ and assimilate with the dominant culture. In case when a person takes only his/her own ethnic group as a basis for cultural identity, ethnic isolation occurs, which is restricting as well, and does not allow for full-fledged activities and participation in the dominant culture. Being bicultural, i.e. combining the bases of ethnic and dominant identities, is regarded a positive resource as it enriches a person, his/her mindset. However, examples of such a successful combination are rare compared

to the more problematic outcomes and marginalization [4, 5]. Thus, the problem of the Armenian communities in the post-Soviet space largely relates to the issue of cultural assimilation, which, as suggested by different sociological circles, progresses in the post-Soviet countries faster than in the Armenian communities of the Western or Muslim countries. This might be caused by several reasons. In particular, Russian is not considered a foreign language by many Armenians, which leads to a situation where the use of Russian is widespread and Armenian squeezed out. The circumstance that the Russian environment is not considered an opposing culture contributes to the matter as well, and due to this, no clear ethno-distinction mechanisms and borderlines are established. Besides, findings of some interviews also come to prove that in case with Russia, the *non-Russian* derogatory designation and thus, the indirect encouragement of non-differentiation and Russification bring to a situation when the migrant Armenians conform fast to the country of their residence in order to avoid being inhibited and discriminated against. Yet remarkably, for the Armenians in the Central Asian countries, as well as in Tbilisi, the Russian language plays the role of the ethnic distinction mechanism, since being an alternative to the language of the country of residence, it helps Armenians to distinguish themselves from the dominant culture and avoid assimilation.

At the same time we have to differentiate between assimilation and acculturation, i.e. internalizing of the culture. Assimilation is one of the possible consequences of acculturation, and the processes of acculturation do not bring to an automatic loss of the own culture or adopting of the foreign culture. The ethnic culture co-existing with the dominant culture can efficiently resist the assimilation to a considerable degree by preserving the elements of ethnic roots and this is based on the aspiration to be told apart culturally and ethnically, and to maintain the distinctive borderline. Meanwhile, such resistance does not imply isolation and absence of interaction with the representatives of the titular ethnicity of the country [7].

***Current socio-psychological perceptions of community.*** Generally, community means a group of people who live on a common territory and interact. The notion of community often implies organizing around common values and a social accord. After the emergence of the Internet the concept of community was revised and currently it does not necessarily imply living together in a physical location, as now people can “get together” virtually, share common interests and act towards their implementation, regardless of the place of residence. Today the communication between different Armenian communities is implemented by and large through involvement in the social networks. Besides, over the recent period among the Armenians living abroad the classical mode of community life was substituted by more individual forms, so herein we use the notion of community in a sense of a group of

people living in a given area and characterized by more or less active internal ties and connections with the motherland, the “members” of which may have never met in person. In this sense, weak communal ties mean a low level of first-hand information interchange and joint action, but not necessarily absence of frequent meetings.

It would be useful to consider the approach of McMillan and Chavis within the scope of the psychological study of communal identity, sense of belonging and involvement [8]. Particularly, in their approach they put forward the notion of *psychological sense of community* which includes 4 main components:

- *Membership*: this implies group identification, sense of belonging, existence of the boundaries with the other groups, including through common symbol systems.
- *Influence*: the members of the community need to feel that they have power to somehow influence the group and simultaneously the community has power to influence them.
- *Integration and fulfillment of needs*: the participatory stance of the community members and any kind of reward for their participation is also of essential importance for a distinct community sense.
- *Shared emotional connection*: this is considered to be a crucial element for the efficient activities of the community and implies efficient cooperation. The latter is regarded successful when the members participate in events that are *significant, understandable* for them and have more or less *predictable* result; whereas cooperation on an uncertain basis hinders group's solidarity.

The aforementioned types of the collective identity served a basis for interpreting the results of a social and psychological study carried out among young Armenians living in the post-Soviet countries.

From the psychological point of view working on of the problems of the Armenianness implies studying a certain individual as a unit of the community, because the individual, with his/her activity and degree of involvement, clarity and uncertainty of his/her national identity, system of senses and perceptions connected with his/her ethnic affiliation and the country of residence, is the bearer of any identity, which needs protection and development. The problems and resources “reside” in this very individual and not in the abstract Armenianness.

### ***Young Armenians in the post-Soviet Countries: the Results of a Socio-Psychological Study***

This article highlights the results of the social and psychological study of the young Armenian people in the post-Soviet countries; here we aimed at getting the most accurate information about the aforementioned aspects through a survey.

***The methods and organization of the study:*** Given the goals and specific purposes of the study, the following methods were developed and implemented.

- A combined semi-standardized questionnaire has been developed which was partially based on the “Sense of Community Index” (*McMillan and Chavis*) and the underlying theory about the elements of sense of community (*membership/identification, influence, integration, shared emotional connection*), adapted to the context of the Armenianness and Armenian communities. The questionnaire was designed to find out the emotional connections and the level of real interactions with Armenia and the country of residence, as well as to uncover the informational activity. Questions about connections with the place of residence were included because these connections are also a background within which the interrelations with the compatriots and motherland are formed.
- To better understand the tendencies of ethnic identity in the studied group, the psychological testing methodology of the “types of ethnic identity” by G. U. Soldatova [9] has been used. This methodology determines the dominance of one of the following types of ethnic identity: positive ethnic identity (positive attitude to one’s own ethnicity combined with the high level of tolerance toward other nations); ethnic indifference (with regard to own national identity); ethno-nihilism (rejection/departure from own ethnic group); ethno-egoism (ethnocentric approach when the primacy is ascribed to own ethnicity), ethno-isolation (a stance that one’s own ethnic group should not to “mix” with other ethnicities; avoiding any contacts with other ethnic groups), and ethno-fanaticism (the fanatic attitude to own nation, absolutism of its advantages and positive characteristics).

The survey involved students who arrived in Armenia from the post-Soviet countries, as well as those who filled out the electronic versions of the questionnaire on the Internet. Thirty-one Armenian young men and women (18 males and 13 females) aged 18-35 years from Russia (23), Georgia (6), and one each from Ukraine and Moldova participated in the survey. Considering the main composition of the group, the results of the survey and their interpretation specifically relate to the young Armenian adults from Russia, but with respect to the tendencies they can be used to get an idea about the Armenians from other post-Soviet countries. It should also be mentioned that most of the survey respondents were active in the Armenian-oriented social networks and blogs. Given that the survey participants were those who responded to the call, one may conclude that the survey results first of all represent the stratum of young Armenians who are sensitive to the issues of the Arme-

niancy to some extent. They follow the developments and information flows concerning the Armeniency, and being generally vigorous and well aware, they actively spread information on the issues of the local Armeniency. Most of the respondents have lived in their country of residence for over 10 years, i.e. they have spent there a major part of their conscious life and most probably they are integrated into the social environment of their country of residence rather than in the Armenian society.

### ***Ties with the Country of Permanent Residence***

Among the most positive aspects of living in the country of residence the respondents mentioned the possibility to *find a job* and *the career growth*, as well as proximity to their friends and relatives. The second most important factors were the *standard of living*, *social security* and *personal freedom*.

Table 1

#### *The positive factors of living in the country of residence*

|    |   | Number | Percentage* <sup>1</sup> |
|----|---|--------|--------------------------|
| 1  | Chances to find a job                                 | 15     | 48.4%                    |
| 2  | Possibility of career growth                          | 15     | 48.4%                    |
| 3  | Proximity to the friends/family/relatives             | 15     | 48.4%                    |
| 4  | Living standards                                      | 10     | 32.3%                    |
| 5  | Social security, economic opportunities               | 10     | 32.3%                    |
| 6  | Personal freedom                                      | 9      | 29.0%                    |
| 7  | Possibility to get education                          | 6      | 19.4%                    |
| 8  | Large number of compatriots in the place of residence | 6      | 19.4%                    |
| 9  | Culture and people of the country of residence        | 5      | 16.1%                    |
| 10 | Feeling safe  | 1      | 3.2%                     |
| 11 | Other answers   | 1      | 3.2%                     |

The said matters were mentioned as problematic from the perspective of living in Armenia, including, in particular, the issues related to finding a job, standards of living, financial and social security, as well as professional and personal growth, restrictions of personal freedom. In this regard it can be argued that the factors which keep the Armenians in the countries of their residence at the same time keep them away from Armenia. In addition, these factors include not only economic, but also psychological needs, caused by inner satisfaction or dissatisfaction (communication, development, etc.).

<sup>1</sup>This and other tables with asterisks present multiple choice data when the respondents were allowed to choose up to 3 answers instead of just one. Thus, the percentage sum of all answers here and in other asterisked tables varies between 100 and 300%.

Regarding the problems associated with living in the country of residence the most frequent answers were: *being far from Armenia*, *insufficient ties* with Armenia and *restricted opportunities for the Armenian education/schools*, as well as the *unfriendly attitude* of the local population. Such orientation of the answers indicates that Armenia still remains important as a factor. The answers also suggest that the problems of living outside one's homeland are above all perceived as issues of identity and its preserving.

Table 2

*The negative factors of living in the country of residence*

|    |   | Num-<br>ber | Percent-<br>age* |
|----|---|-------------|------------------|
| 1  | Restricted opportunities of the Armenian education/schools                              | 12          | 42.9%            |
| 2  | Being far away from Armenia   | 12          | 42.9%            |
| 3  | Insufficient ties with Armenia  | 10          | 35.7%            |
| 4  | Unfriendly attitude of the people in the country of residence                           | 8           | 28.6%            |
| 5  | Being far from family/friends   | 6           | 21.4%            |
| 6  | Restricted opportunities for professional growth and self-actualization                 | 6           | 21.4%            |
| 7  | Social and economic issues  | 5           | 17.9%            |
| 8  | Security problems   | 4           | 14.3%            |
| 9  | Restricted opportunities of finding a prospective job (compared to the main population) | 4           | 14.3%            |
| 10 | Restrictions of personal freedom  | 1           | 3.6%             |
| 11 | Inadequate social status  | 1           | 3.6%             |
| 12 | Relations with the local Armenians  | 0           | 0%               |
| 13 | Other answers   | 3           | 10.7%            |

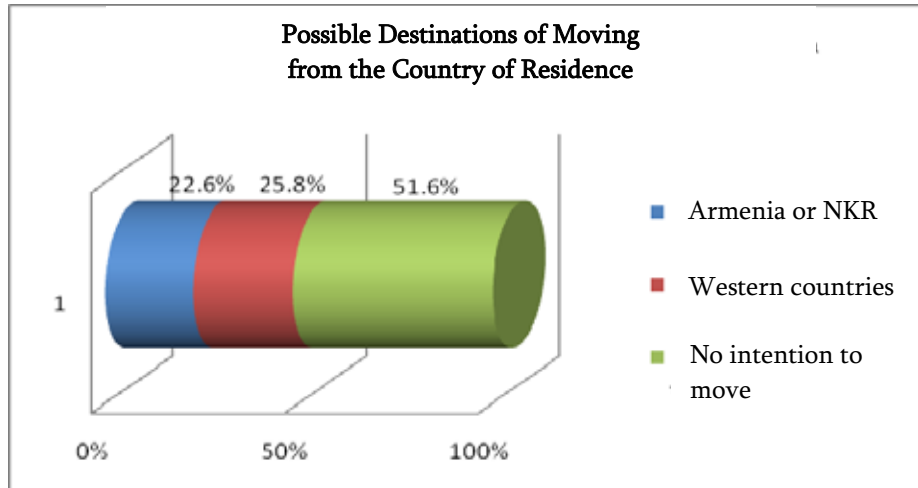
It is also worth special noting that significantly more positive aspects of living in the country of residence were mentioned than hindering ones<sup>1</sup>. This suggests that the factors “keeping” them in the country of residence still prevail. Such conclusion is also substantiated by the fact that most of the respondents tended to affirm that they “felt like home in the country of residence”. Yet this should not be viewed as a negative indicator with respect to the weak ties with the motherland, but first of all as a positive sign indicating a high level of integration in the country of residence and not being marginalized.

The most frequent answers concerning the negative factors could be found in *Table 2*.

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the respondents used all three fields for answers to mention the positive factors, while in case of negative factors the 3<sup>rd</sup> option often remained unused.



Figure 1



About half of the respondents mentioned that they intend to leave the place of residence in a foreseeable future.

As seen in *Figure 1*, among the intended countries of destination the western countries (the US and Europe) and Armenia (the RoA and Artsakh as motherlands) are mentioned in almost the same proportion. However, returning to Armenia was spoken about with some reservations – “in distant plans”, “in prospective”, “not now, but some day”<sup>1</sup>, which suggests that such answers are mostly desired visions rather than actual intentions. Meanwhile, the factors that keep them in the given country are a lot more relevant and in fact, moving to Armenia is mentally delayed to an uncertain point, which may never occur.

It needs to be added that among the respondents the level of contacts and relations with the natives of the country of residence, and the indices of trust to them were generally quite high (see *Figure 3*, *Figure 5*). Most of the respondents mentioned average or high level of communication with the representatives of the titular nation in the country of residence.

### ***Intra-Community Relations: Sense of Community, Involvement, Interaction***

It has to be mentioned that the overwhelming majority of the respondents were not members of any Armenian community structure or any other Armenian social and cultural organization, and they did not take part in the events organized by the local

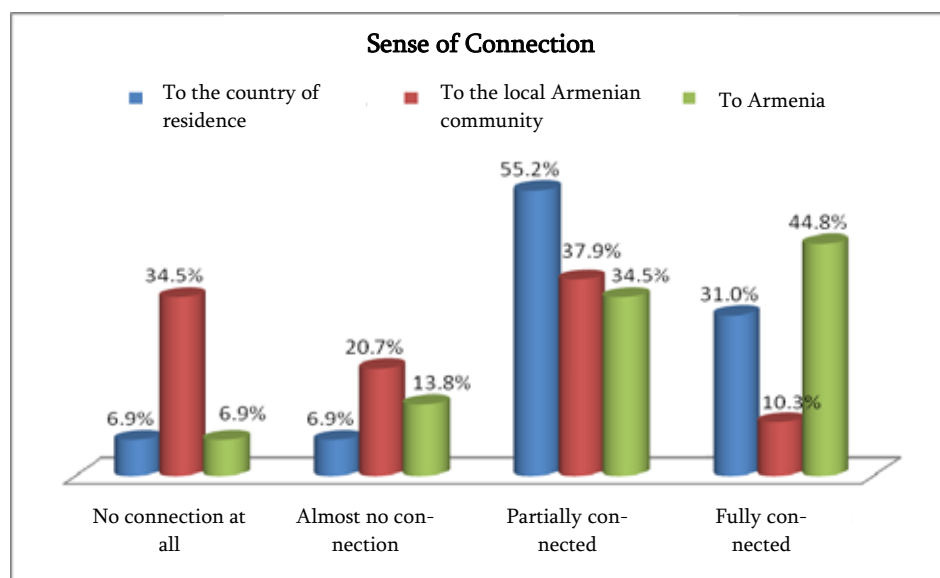
<sup>1</sup>In addition to the “yes/no” closed question about the intention to return, the questionnaire included additional open questions, in which the respondents detailed the directions they would prefer to move to, the motives of leaving or staying in the country.

Armenian community. The involvement in the issues concerning Armenianness manifests itself in other, non-community formats; it is mostly implemented through exchange of information with Armenia and Armenians and networking participation in the developments related to Armenianness.

In order to clarify the problems that the Armenian communities face in their countries of residence, instead of multiple choice answers the questionnaire offered open questions, i.e. the respondents were asked to point out such problems. Having grouped these answers we can state that the prevailing problems included *ethnic discrimination/xenophobia* by the host country population (about 35% of the respondents mentioned this issue), *social and housing conditions* (24%), issues connected with the social and legal *status*, the attitude and *migration policy* of the host state, problems related to the *Armenian schools and preservation of the Armenian language*. The isolation of the Armenians (not from the public of the host country, but from each other) and the community being under-organized, mentioned on several instances, need a special consideration. It is worth mentioning that the focus of the local Armenians on the material values, their ostentatious character, narrow-mindedness, little desire to develop, i.e. spiritual and intellectual issues were frequently cited in the answers.

Though many problems concerning the local Armenian community were mentioned, the willingness to get personally involved in such matters was rather moderate: about 33% of the respondents were not interested in personally contributing to the solution of the aforesaid issues.

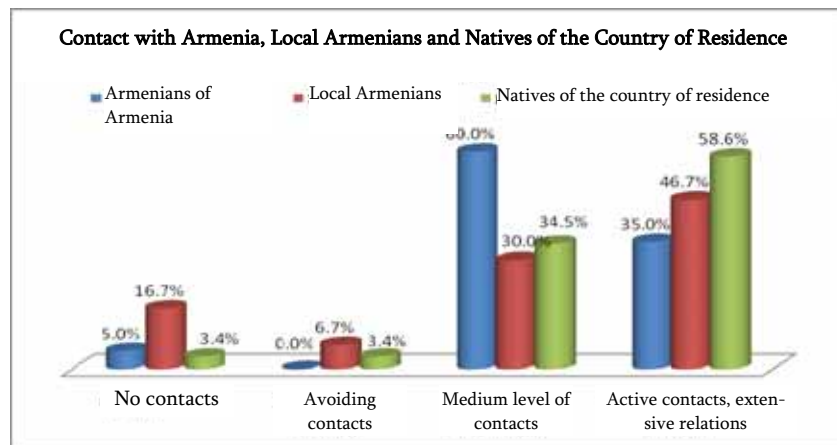
Figure 2



As already mentioned, one of the important elements that typify a community is its members' emotional connection with it. The respondents were asked to assess their connection not only to the local Armenian community, but also to their country of residence and Armenia. These assessments are presented in *Figure 2* and show that the connection to the local Armenian community is low and generally is inferior to that for both Armenia and country of residence. More than a half of the respondents, about 55%, avowed that they have no connection to the community, while only a small part of the respondents – 10.3% acknowledged full connection to the community. For comparison, the overwhelming majority stated partial or full connection to their motherland – 79%, and the country of residence – 86.2%. Interestingly, connection to the country of residence was stated both by those who felt connection to the community and those who did not. Thus, whether feeling connected or not to the Armenian community has no implications as to supporting or impeding the adaptation to the country of residence. Almost the same pattern could be observed when considering the connection to Armenia and the local Armenian community – the subjective feeling of affection towards the motherland was considerably higher than that to the local community.

It is important to have the assessment of the emotional connection, because such bond implies productive cooperation. Hence, the absence of connection is a specific indicator of the lack of such cooperation. In this case the low connection to the Armenian community indirectly indicates weak ties at the level of actions either.

Figure 3



Considering the aggregated data of contacts and relations (see *Figure 3*) it should be mentioned that the level of contacts and relations with the local Armenians is generally high – about 77% of the respondents stated average or high level of

communication with the local Armenians. Therefore, it can be contended that there are some active relations with the local Armenians, but mostly at the level of communication only, and this does not interrelate with the feeling of connection to the community; perhaps because these relations occur in personalized manners, rather than at the level of the community integration.

Comprehension of community and assessment of its role can be construed even more directly through questions concerning the influence. The factor of influence includes several aspects: influence of a member on the community, influence of the community on its member and influence of the community on a larger society, the country/area of residence. In this aspect low indicators were recorded. For instance, the community had zero influence on 58% of the respondents and partial influence on 16%. Their own influence on the community was assessed to be zero by 61%, and about 19% of the respondents stated a partial influence; no one pointed to high level of influence. The assessments of the role of the community in the country/city of residence were a little higher (see *Table 3* for details).

*Table 3**Influence of the community and the influence of the members on the community*

| The level of influence | Influence of the community on the country of the residence | Influence of the community on the respondent | Influence of the respondent on the community |
|------------------------|--|--|--|
| No influence           | 35.5%  | 58%  | 61,3%  |
| Minimal influence      | 32.3%  | 16,1%  | 13%  |
| Some influence         | 19.3%  | 16,1%  | 19,4%  |
| Major influence        | 9.7%   | 3,2%   | 0%   |
| No answer              | 3,25%  | 6.5%   | 6.5%   |

In order to understand the intra-community ties, questions about mutual assistance were used. The majority of the respondents – about 56%, never turned to the Armenians from the community for assistance, about 14% asked them for help very rarely, 30% – sometimes. The respondents gave similar answers about their assistance to the members of the community.

With the questions about turning for assistance it is also possible to get indirect information about the level of the mutual trust.

For instance, answering the question “Who would you turn to for help first?” (see *Figure 4*) more than half of the respondents mentioned the “local Armenian friends/relatives” and 22.2% “local non-Armenian friends”, whereas the willingness to turn to the local Armenian community as a community body was the lowest (only one answer). Furthermore, for the majority of the respondents – 54.5%, the community was the last one they would turn to for help. Thus, the results are positive in terms of cooperative relations maintained among the Armenians. Nevertheless, the results

come to prove that the functionality and trustworthiness of the community structures are low. The cooperation between the Armenians still remains largely at the interpersonal level, and the institutional format of organizing has a low profile. There is a certain micro-environment around the local Armenians, though it is not about the community organization, but about the strong friendship and kinship ties.

Figure 4

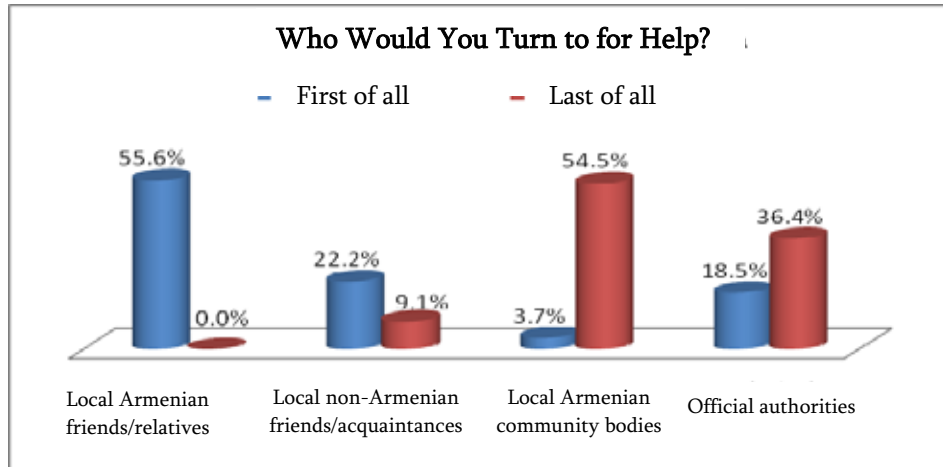
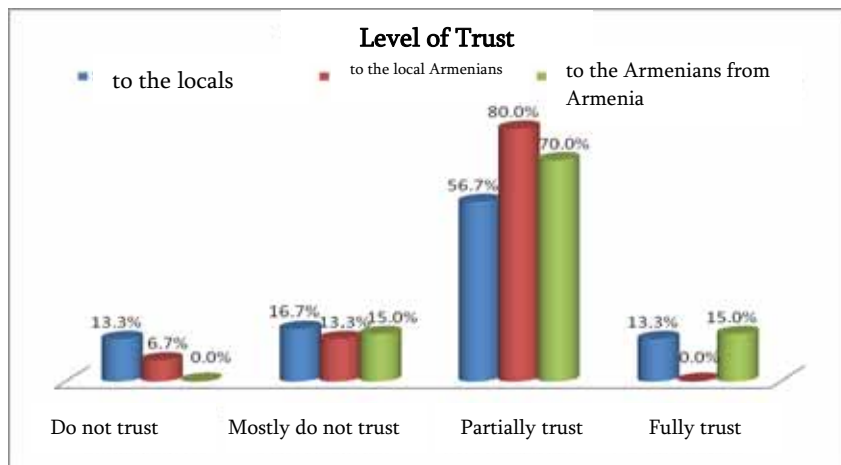


Figure 5



As for the level of the trust, it has to be also added that the overwhelming majority of the respondents – 80%, tended to trust other local Armenians, but interestingly enough, this was expressed by a somewhat cautious answer “partially trust”, and nobody expressed full trust to the local compatriots. More details on trust assessments are presented in *Figure 5*.

The answers about supposed preferable business partners provide additional evidence for the sufficient level of the mutual trust. The local Armenians were the most frequently chosen option for business partnership – 63% (see *Table 4* for details).

Referring to one of the most important aspects of communication, the language of communication, Armenian was the main language of communication only for 33.3% of the respondents, and for the remaining 66.7% this language was Russian, which in fact, is natural. Even among the Armenians from Tbilisi the main language of communication was Russian, which comes to prove that in this country Russian is used by the Armenians as a means of ethnic differentiation.

The questionnaire also included separate questions about the language use at workplace/home, with friends and family. Quite naturally the Russian language is used at work. It is promising to some extent that Armenian is partially preserved as a language of communication with friends (25.5% of respondents) and in family (51.5%).

The ambivalent answers to the question “What is your mother tongue?” deserve special consideration. The majority (66.7%), but not all have indicated Armenian as their mother tongue. Twenty-three percent responded that their mother tongue is Russian and 10% were undecided, mentioning a combination of Russian and Armenian.

The respondents were also asked to specify an approximate percentage proportion of the following four groups among their contacts and friends: Armenians from Armenia, Armenians of the local Armenian community, Armenians from other countries and people of other ethnicities. The Armenians from Armenia were mentioned as the group who they communicated with in the highest proportion, the local Armenians had the second largest share and the representatives of the local native ethnic group came third. The main conclusion is that despite they rarely visit their homeland, Armenia and Armenians from Armenia still remain the essential part of their circle of communication, surpassing the local Armenians. This comes to prove once again that in the programs of organization and consolidation of the Armenian communities, the core and the main topic around which the visions of consolidation should be built is Armenia, and not only the community with its attempts to overcome internal problems. This was even blatantly stated by some respondents, e.g. “I do not believe I should do anything for the community; if anything is worth doing, I would rather do it for my motherland.”

Summarizing this part of the analysis, it can be noted that the Armenian communities in the post-Soviet countries do not correspond to the classical perception of an organized community. There is no sufficient consciousness of being a part of the Armenian community and the communal identity at both emotional and practical levels. Armenia is perceived as the real object of the “Armenian” actions. The relations with Armenia are discussed next.

***The Community-Armenia Relations:  
Interaction and Prerequisites for the Involvement***

To outline study it can be stated that the young Armenian respondents (mainly from Russia) were highly adapted and integrated in the society they lived in, though at the same time maintaining ties with and attributing significance to Armenia were typical among them. This was mostly reflected in their answers to the *direct* questions concerning the connection with the motherland, significance of the issues in this regard, relations with the compatriots. However, the answers to the questions *indirectly* relating to the same aspects differed to a certain extent. For example, about 80% of the respondents stated partial or full-fledged connection to the motherland in their answers to the question about the sense of connection (See *Figure 2*). Yet some reservation should be exercised once these answers are compared to those concerning the willingness to return to Armenia. For the majority of the respondents the main reason for visiting Armenia was still a short-term vacation. Thus, the positive answers more often point to desirable visions of the motherland, rather than their actual intentions and actions. The direct and indirect questions about the level of trust can be related in the same way. As it has already been mentioned in the previous section, the level of the trust to the compatriots living in Armenia is quite high (see *Figure 5*). However, in case of the indirect question when the respondents were asked to classify four possible groups with respect to preferences in choosing a partner for a joint business, the rank of Armenians from Armenia was surpassed not only by that of the local Armenians, but also the natives of the country of residence (see *Table 4*).

Table 4

Preferences for a partner in a joint business

|   |   | <b>First of all</b> | <b>Last of all</b> |
|---|---|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Local Armenian friends/relatives            | 63%                 | 7.7%               |
| 2 | Non-Armenians from the country of residence | 22.2%               | 3.8%               |
| 3 | Representatives of other ethnic groups      | 11.1%               | 57.7%              |
| 4 | Acquaintances in Armenia                    | 3.7%                | 30.8%              |
| 5 | Total                                       | 100%                | 100%               |

Thus, the question about the business partner, being more pragmatic and specific, in a way “checked” the abstract question about the trust, and recorded humbler results together with the presence of a psychological distance. This means the positive assessments of the motherland do not imply a high probability for self-organization and ties with the compatriots, though they can be considered a prerequisite for that; all these issues need special scrutiny and clarification.

As the comparison data seen in *Figure 6* indicate, most of the respondents felt like home (partially or absolutely) both in the country of residence and in Armenia, i.e. they regarded these places dear, customary, and psychologically comfortable. The other common trend was that whether feeling integrated in the country of residence or not, the young people tended to feel like home in Armenia (64.7% and 85.7%, respectively). Hence, being integrated in the society of the country of residence does not interfere with the affection for Armenia. The motherland, regardless of the degree of adaptation to the country of residence, continues to play an important role.

The perceptions about the problems in Armenia and their significance are also essential for understanding the relations with the motherland and willingness to cooperate. In the aspect of living in Armenia mainly social and economic reasons were mentioned, in particular, the problems of finding a job, unemployment (not necessarily the lack of jobs, but rather the restricted opportunities to make money, do business, the undeveloped business sphere, etc.), quality of life and socio-economic conditions. Alongside these problems, no less importance was attributed to the social and psychological issues, personal factors, particularly the limits to professional growth, differences in upbringing and socialization/mentality causing difficulties in communication with the compatriots, existence of the language barrier in this communication, as well as a number of wider external and internal political factors. Thus, it can be noted that part of these problems are factors that prompt leaving Armenia and the other part are the reasons for not returning to Armenia. In the second group there are many psychologically conditioned factors arising from the problems related to satisfying the needs for development, growth and communication.

Anyhow, the problems of Armenia still preserve significance among the respondents, which is also manifested by their willingness to personally contribute to the solution of these problems.

Figure 6

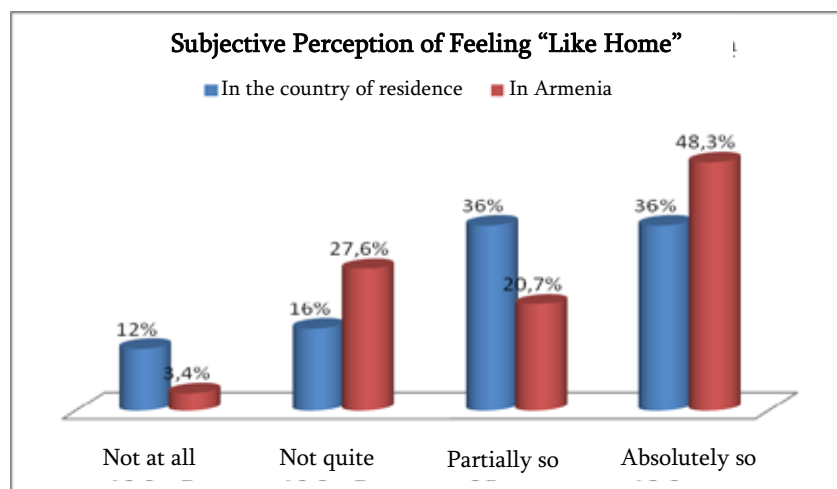
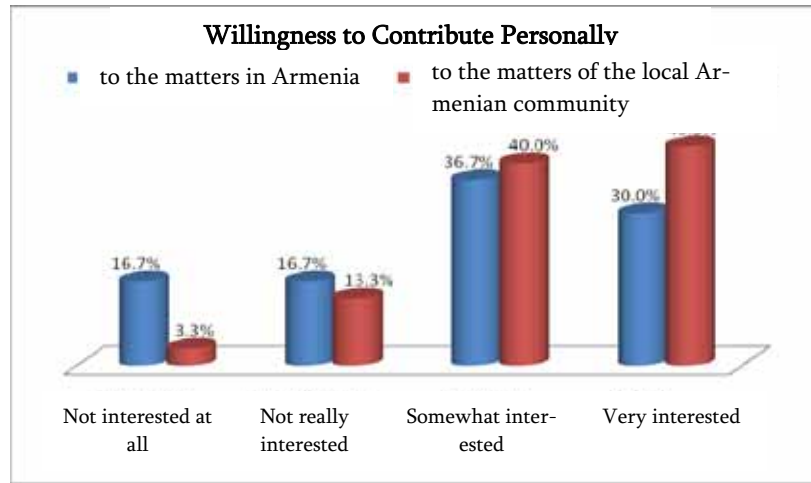




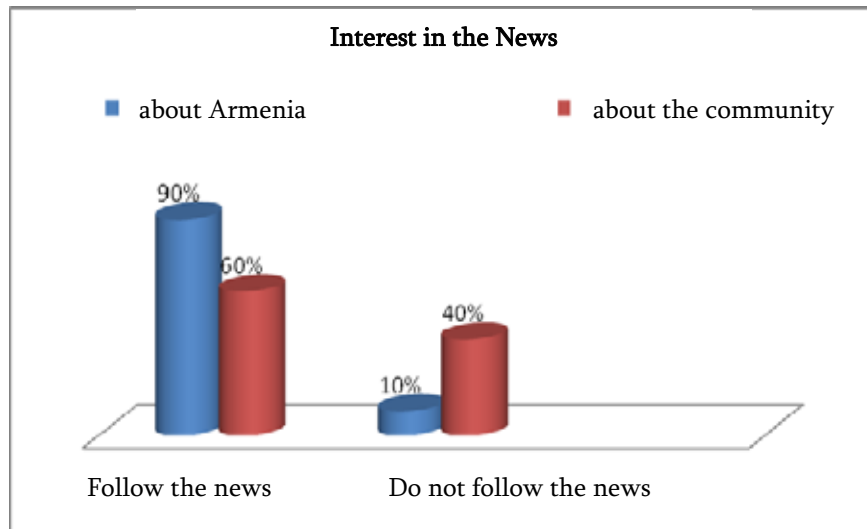
Figure 7



***The Informational Aspect of the Community-Armenia relations***

As already mentioned, the ties with Armenia are manifested, inter alia, by a greater interest in the information flows concerning Armenia. Comparing the data in *Figure 8* makes it clear that the interest in news about Armenia is much higher than in information about events of the local Armenian community, which, on the one hand, is positive, showing the tendency to preserve ties with the motherland and caring about the developments in Armenia. On the other hand, in fact, the intra-community issues are not perceived as being of national importance.

Figure 8



Among the areas of information about Armenia the followings were deemed important: first – domestic policy/the state, almost nearly equal – the foreign policy of Armenia, then with a slight difference – the issues of culture/youth. The lowest priority in terms of interest was given to the economy of the country.

*The predominant sources of information about Armenia* were found to be the Armenian informational web-sites above all, second – informal information sources/blogs, and then Russian Internet information resources. For details see *Table 5*.

Table 5

*Main Sources of Information about Armenia*

|   |  | Number | Percentage |
|---|--|--------|------------|
| 1 | Armenian information websites                  | 19     | 65.5%      |
| 2 | Informal information sources/blogs             | 11     | 37.9%      |
| 3 | Russian information web-sites                  | 9      | 31.0%      |
| 4 | TV channels in the country/region of residence | 6      | 20.7%      |
| 5 | Armenian satellite TV channels                 | 5      | 17.2%      |
| 6 | International TV, press, web-sites             | 5      | 17.2%      |
| 7 | Press in the country of residence              | 3      | 10.3%      |
| 8 | Local Armenian mass media                      | 3      | 10.3%      |

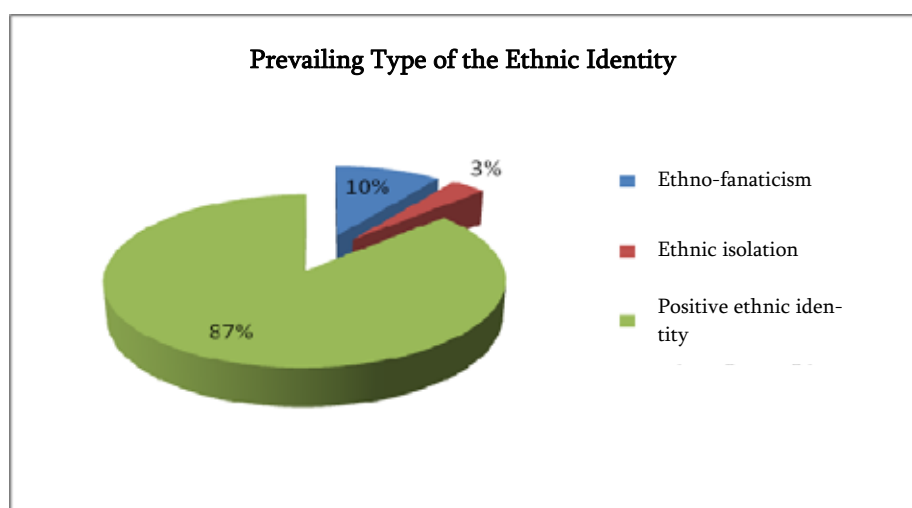
### *Issues of national identity*

It is known that the prevalence of positive characteristics of a group, at least from the perspective an individual's subjective assessment, is essential for the positive group identity. In other words, the group or community to identify with should be characterized by certain attributes which would motivate an individual to classify (categorize) oneself in that group. From this point of view, some issues of national identity are characteristic not only to Armenians from Diaspora but also to those living in Armenia; in everyday talks Armenia is often described in terms of difficulties and searching a way out of these difficulties. Identity is a subjective affiliation which must have positive characteristics and it should be an asset rather than problem for a person, urge to act for the group and in the name of the group, and not to cause tendency to avoid. Nevertheless, it would be simplistic to think that usefulness is the main factor of identifying with a group or nation. Existence of national problems per se does not cause a revision of the identity and selection of a different identity, even for people who are integrated in another culture. As a matter of fact, despite the flexibility currently attributed to identity in both academic discourse and mass media, it is not easy to reject one's ethnic identity, and having roots continues to be one of the basic needs of a human being. It can be observed everywhere, that in spite of

the broadly discussed obstacles and complaints, the national identity of the young Armenian “seeks” ways to get stronger.

According to the “type of ethnic identity” method, the pattern in the studied group was favorable. The majority (26) of the respondents had the positive type of ethnic identity which is considered to be a norm and a good mindset. Other types had lower rates: ethno-fanaticism was detected for only 3 respondents, and there was only one person who displayed ethno-isolation. Other types of ethnic identity are not included in the *Figure 9* below, as they have not been manifested at all.

*Figure 9*



The derived positive ethnic identity does not suppose definitely unproblematic perception of the motherland, but it generally outlines a positive attitude to one's own identity. The emotions regarding motherland could be mixed and may contain controversies. For example, the most frequent answers to the question “What do you think/feel about your ethnicity?” in our questionnaire were a combination of dualistically positive and negative assessments, e.g. “pride and sadness”, “pride and soreness”, “joy and concern”, etc. Such wordings are a reason for concern and at the same time they give hope, as the problems of their country seem to have not lost importance for these people.

**Conclusion:**  
***Opportunities and Risks in the Relations between  
the Homeland and Young People from Diaspora***

Having studied the different aspects of the relations of the Armenian young people from post-Soviet countries with the Armeniacy, local Armenian communities and population in the country of residence, we can argue that among the young Armenians from the post-Soviet countries subjectively attaching importance to the problems of the motherland, positive ethnic identity, willingness to contribute to the affairs of their motherland and a number of other favorable factors are present. These factors can be considered a sufficient starting point for forming a platform of some specific joint actions. At the same time, the data suggest that the levels of feelings, ideas and actions need to be considered in a differentiated manner while making evaluations and forecasts. With respect to these levels the issues become even more outlined and, consequently, at the programs scale there is much to be done.

It is also becoming clear that there are two fronts for uniting the communities, one of which is the activation of the passive constituency and the other one is the widening and spelling out the cooperation with the active segment. Provided that most of the young Armenians who promptly responded to the call to participate in the survey were from Russia, it can be concluded that the Armenian community of Russia is the most active one among those in the post-Soviet countries. This also provides grounds for corroborating that this community is the leader not only size-wise, but also in terms of being a locomotive and coordinator in boosting organization and eagerness of the other communities. At the same time, the connection with Armenia is not through the community structures. With this in mind it can be contended that intra-community unity and organization will not be efficient if based mainly on intra-community development programs. Instead, a higher organizational efficiency can be anticipated if these activities are based on an attempt to unite communities through actions for the benefit of their motherland.

*June, 2010*

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