

Social Absorption of Soviet Immigrants: Integration or Isolation*

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Now, five years after 1972, we stop and reflect—where are these immigrants today? Are they a breed alien to our local Jewish communities? Do we have some common bond with our distant relatives? Do they see themselves as an integrating and healthy force entering our communities, or have they become isolates, a negative and withdrawn sub-group within the Jewish community?

The American Jewish community has accepted the responsibility of resettling Soviet Jews since 1968. According to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, over 16,000 Jews have come to the United States from the Soviet Union. In 1972, communities outside of New York began experiencing the first shock waves from the Soviet Jew and his culture.

Agencies have documented their initial experience with the Russians. We all saw a clash of cultures and observed the struggle of our communities to understand this new and seemingly strange group. Our initial experience made us raise such questions as: Are these immigrants truly Jews? How would they view our Jewish communities and would they want to become part of the American Jewish community?¹

Who is the Soviet Jew? Are these people from the Soviet Union a homogeneous group? No! They are made up of many groups with cultural characteristics and practices common to the area in which they lived in the Soviet Union. In discussing characteristics of the Russians and their resettlement process, it is important for a community to know if the Soviet Jews come from Moscow, the Ukraine, Georgia, or other areas.

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¹ Burton S. Rubin, "The Soviet Refugee: Challenge to the American Jewish Community Resettlement System," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. LII, No. 2 (1975), pp. 196-197.

bond with our distant relatives? Do they see themselves as an integrating and healthy force entering our communities, or have they become isolates, a negative and withdrawn sub-group within the Jewish community? How have they reacted to the multiple Jewish options now open to them?

Despite our initial clash with the Soviet immigrants and his culture, what has happened over this period of five years? This paper will try to provide some initial and tentative impressions from the Cleveland experience. We are not attempting to draw conclusions about Soviet immigrants as a whole, but *only* for the people who have settled in Cleveland. Each community has differences which affect resettlement and may have resettled a Soviet population of varied cultural backgrounds. Only in New York, where approximately 50 percent of all the Soviet immigrants to the United States resettle, is there a large enough population to explore the adjustment factors for the various sub-groups within this wave of immigrants.

Resettlement is a process with a beginning, middle, and end. The Soviet immigration has been continuous, keeping us so busy with "beginnings" that we have not had time to explore the implications of this new group in our midst. Erik Erikson talks about immigration as being a decision to pick one's self up by his roots and begin a new way of life.² What type of new life has he begun to establish? Abraham Weinberg raises the spectre of the dangers to any immigrant population:

² Erik Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1964, p. 84.

... the mere fact of leaving the homeland means a sudden change in the person's life space thereby a frequently perturbing event or even an upheaval. There is always the danger of uprootedness for the person who leaves his native country, his family, his friends, his home surroundings, the place where he spent his childhood and grew up. From the moment of his emigration, he will have to live far away from the community where everyone knew him, his parents and perhaps even his forefathers . . . He no longer belongs because of who he is, but because of what he is.³

This raises a significant question for our communities: Has the Soviet immigrant taken hold and begun to achieve his place in our open market, achievement-oriented society, or is life so different and difficult that he has made a hostile retreat?

Survey

In attempts to explore where the Soviet families are today, the Jewish Family Service Association of Cleveland, Ohio surveyed its caseload of Soviet immigrants who were sponsored by the Cleveland Jewish community from 1972 through 1976. During this period, 201 families comprising 527 individuals came to Cleveland from the Soviet Union through HIAS. We were able to interview 148 families (74 percent of these arrivals).

Interviews were conducted with the adult heads of families over a two-month period using a seven-page original questionnaire developed by the agency. We were able to pre-test the questionnaire before beginning the interviews. The instrument was designed to explore the following areas: family composition; native republic in the U.S.S.R.; arrival date in Cleveland; and present housing, employment, income, and social, religious, and emotional adjustment. The interviewers were caseworkers, and the information obtained has given us a picture of the Soviet experience in Cleveland. We felt this would

³ Abraham Weinberg, M.D., *Migration and Belonging*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961, pp. 172-3.

provide guidelines for future service and understanding of this group for our community.

Population

The population whom we reached comprised small family units: one member—15 percent; two members—26 percent; three members—32 percent; four members—24 percent; and more than four members—3 percent. That is, families of three and four members made up 56 percent of our population, and 97 percent of the Soviet families were units under five members. Also, 43 percent of these families had children. The distribution of ages of family members are: 9 percent over 65; 11 percent between 55-65; 57 percent between 19 to 54 years old; and 23 percent 18 or less. Approximately 68 percent of the Russians are employable adults. Also, for these 148 Soviet families there have been 13 marriages, one divorce, one death, and eight births.

The republics of origin: from the Ukraine, 116 families out of 148 or 78 percent; 15 percent from the Russian Republic, 4 percent from Moldavia, and 3 percent from other republics in the Soviet Union. 74 percent or 109 families out of 148 have had reunions, with relatives in Cleveland, either already United States citizens or themselves recent immigrants from the Soviet Union.

Thus, Cleveland's refugees are primarily from the Ukraine and they came to be reunited with relatives. We have found relative reunions to be an important factor in the immigrants' adjustment. Relatives provide emotional and material support to new immigrants and assist in the interpretation of agency policy and programs. They are also helpful in locating housing, finding jobs, interpreting, providing transportation and many other areas.

Present Housing

Initially, families are settled in the suburb of Cleveland Heights which is the oldest section of the present Jewish community of Cleve-

land. Approximately 30 percent of the population of Cleveland Heights is Jewish. It is a community of about 8.2 square miles with a diversity of housing. Housing includes single-family homes, two-family homes, three-family homes, and apartments. Among the Jewish community's many resources located in Cleveland Heights are nine Orthodox and three Conservative synagogues; one Jewish Day School, the Cleveland Hebrew Academy; the Cleveland Mikveh; five kosher butcher shops; two kosher bakeries; and one kosher restaurant; also, the Jewish Community Center and the Jewish Family Service Association are within Cleveland Heights, with the Jewish Vocational Service only blocks away from community boundaries. It is not necessary to name all the Jewish resources for one to see the distinctive Jewish atmosphere of this community.

In housing status, 75.5 percent of the families live in a 1½ square-mile area of Cleveland Heights, and 53 percent had moved from the initial housing in which they were settled. There has been housing mobility; families have upgraded their housing; yet, their preference has been to remain in the Jewish community of Cleveland Heights. Also, 69 percent of the families surveyed have one or more cars leading one to believe that families could have moved to other suburbs with comparable rents. Fourteen percent of the families have purchased homes in Cleveland Heights and adjoining suburbs. Family residences were shown to us with a sense of pride and the homes appeared warm and "lived in." They were homes which truly demonstrated a sense of permanence and a feeling of being well-cared for; we saw numerous artifacts from the Soviet Union.

We may speculate about the reasons families have remained in Cleveland Heights: Is it because of the familiarity of the community? Is it due to the closeness of other Soviets, family and friends? What part does the Jewish atmosphere of the community affect families' movement? The important fact is that the Soviet families have stayed in the Jewish community.

Employment

A critical factor for any immigrant population is employment status and we all know the importance of vocation to the Soviet Jew's identity. According to a recent study, "... immigrants take about 13 years to catch up to the earnings of native-born Americans of comparable age, schooling, and area of residence."⁴

How have Soviet families adapted as earners in our society? We found that 40 percent of the families had incomes over \$12,000 and 20 percent had incomes below \$4,000. (This last category includes families with aged and disabled.) The remaining 40 percent had incomes between \$4,000—\$11,999. The income level of families in the general community of greater Cleveland (Cuyahoga County) as of the 1970 Census was: below \$4,000—11 percent; \$4,000 to \$11,999—44 percent; \$12,000 and over—45 percent. Income levels of the Soviet families thus compare with those of families in the general community.⁵

45 percent of the Soviet families have two or more employed adult members. This is comparable to the general trend in the United States where the proportion of families with two workers or more was 49 percent in 1975.⁶ Our impression is that Soviet individuals have kept jobs with which they are not completely satisfied and have accepted the idea of employment in fields other than their specialties. Families also seem geared to both spouses working as long as child-care can be arranged. This appears to be a carryover from their work-lives in the Soviet Union where husbands and wives both work in order to survive economically.⁷

Another of our impressions was that these families seemed oriented toward providing for themselves and trying to get ahead in Ameri-

⁴ The Cleveland Plain Dealer, 5/4/77, p. 4B.

⁵ 1970 Census of Population & Housing PHC (1)—45, p. 103.

⁶ Monthly Labor Review, May, 1976. U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, p. 13.

⁷ Hedrick Smith, *The Russians*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1976, pp. 179-185.

can society. For the families with incomes between \$4,000—\$12,000, both Jewish Family Service Association and the Jewish Vocational Service of Cleveland recognize the continuing need for job upgrading. This is an area upon which we plan to focus future attention.

One of the most inhibiting factors to initial job placement is the limited English language ability of many of the new arrivals from the Soviet Union. As individuals develop the ability to speak and understand English, their vocational prospects are enhanced. Our interviews demonstrated a progression of language skills for families over time: for families who have been in Cleveland one year or less, 57 percent of the adults need interpreters and for families in Cleveland more than one year, only 26 percent of the adults need interpreters. The development of language skills is also reflected in the fact that only 28 percent of these families read non-English newspapers exclusively.

Jewish Identity

We are Jewish and have felt Jewish all our lives. It makes no difference if we are in Cleveland or Odessa. The only difference is that now we have a sense of pride and the freedom to be Jewish.⁸

In determining the extent to which families have developed elements of Jewish identity in the Soviet Union and Cleveland, the following data was secured:

Activity	Percent of Total U.S.S.R. Cleveland	
Attend Synagogue or Cheder on any level (regular or holidays)	39	89
Speak Yiddish	62	62
Light Candles (Shabbat, holidays, Yahrzeit)	36	59
Read prayer books	20	22
No Jewish practices	24	6

These replies indicate there was some level of Jewish awareness for some while they lived in the Soviet Union. We can also see a desire to

⁸ Comment made by the mother of a Soviet family in Cleveland, April, 1977.

deepen their Jewish identity in Cleveland. We realize it is almost impossible to measure the degree of their Jewish identity, but we were impressed in general by their responses to these questions. Many families speak Yiddish and indicate increases in their synagogue attendance and candle-lighting after coming to Cleveland.

We also asked the direct question, "Do you feel more Jewish here?" The definition of Jewish identity was left to the client's own perception. The extent of Jewish identity may be interpreted differently by different people. Families were quite free in answering with 67 percent of the families elaborating on their replies. We were unable to determine the motivation behind these replies. The recurrent theme we heard related to families' feelings of being safe and free to live and practice Judaism. Some of their answers were:

"More freedom of religion"

"More able to practice traditions at home without fears"

"Able to attend synagogue"

"One does not have to feel ashamed to be a Jew"

Also, we asked the denomination of the synagogue these families attend in Cleveland: 17 percent attended the Orthodox, 44 percent Conservative and 28 percent Reform synagogues, and 11 percent did not attend any synagogue. 89 percent indicated they attend synagogue once a year or more. The high level of attendance, 61 percent, at Orthodox and Conservative synagogues reflects their close proximity to families' homes. The important finding in talking with families was that the particular synagogue they attended did not seem related to any personal conviction. Our impression was that they did not differentiate the various synagogues. Deeper attitudinal study might be required to determine how much religious feeling or wish to be acceptable was behind the attendance. Some of the families who did not attend Synagogue stated they were Jews, but were not religious.

Social Needs

Soviet immigrants came to Cleveland as family units which, at times, consisted of several generations with varying social needs. Erikson points out:

The danger of any period of large-scale uprooting and transmigration is that exterior crises will, in too many individuals and generations, upset the hierarchy of developmental crises and their built-in correctives; and that man will lose those roots that must be planted firmly in meaningful life cycles. For man's true roots are nourished in the sequence of generations and he loses his tap-roots in disrupted developmental time, not in abandoned localities.⁹

Soviet families have come to Cleveland with little apparent disruption in their familial relationships and developmental tasks. Our impression is that they have continued their life tasks in our community and families have remained intact. Children have entered schools in the public and sectarian systems with little difficulty in transition: 27 children attend public schools and 31 attend sectarian schools (Jewish Day Schools and Jewish Day Nursery), and 19 adult children have entered colleges to continue their education. Also, out of 63 families who have parents in Cleveland, 25 or 40 percent of them live together. We were unable to assess the depth of family relationships, but we were impressed by the pride, strong hopes, and aspirations that parents had for their children.

We saw a great social separateness and isolation among these families. We asked heads of families if they had been able to make friends in Cleveland and who were their friends, Russians, Americans, or both. Only 4 percent had what they considered principally American friends; 27 percent had only Russian friends; and 69 percent had American and Russian friends. The 69 percent figure may be misleading as the Russians had a different cultural view or definition of a friend. We asked if they could remember with whom they were friends in the Soviet Union and had they

found people in Cleveland with whom they were friends in the same way? It was the exceptional person who answered yes, even in the case of those families who had been here three to five years.

This question stimulated an outpouring of feeling about the differences between their lives in the Soviet Union and their new lives in Cleveland. Hedrick Smith describes the Russian people as being very warm and open once they take someone into their friendship circle.¹⁰ He saw this as the tremendous strength and solidarity of the Russian people. The families we talked to felt bereft and different in our society. To them, Russia was a much more "open society" where they had close relationships and many friendship bonds. To these families, Americans are more distant and reserved in establishing friendships. The following comments are examples of the negative replies we received regarding the ability to make friends:

"Different society—harder to make friends here"

"Americans are closed characters"

"Different customs and culture—people are more open in Russia—We feel separated here"

"No time to make friends; one has to work hard to survive—In Russia, life is more on the streets, it is easier to make friends"

"Russian people reach out to you"

"Americans are merely acquaintances—Russian people are more open, not so busy"

The Russians see themselves as coming from a different culture with a different language which separates them from Americans. These are perceived as, and are, barriers to building friendships. Yet, a common reaction was that they did not want to be different. They wanted to make friends and to be integrated into the Jewish community. This is one phase of the resettlement where we need to think of new ideas on a community-wide level to provide social opportunities for these immigrants.

One age group in which there seems particularly to be isolation is the aged. A

break-down of individual age ranges indicates that 9 percent are over 65 and 11 percent are between 55-65 years of age. These individuals have been resistant to participating in activities outside of the home and maintain friendships strictly with other Russians. In situations where there are grandchildren in Cleveland, the grandparents, especially grandmothers, take responsibility for child-care. They see this as a continuation of the roles they performed in Russia where they assisted the working mother.¹¹ Some of the aged population have gotten out of the home through involvement in a nutritional program at the Jewish Community Center where they are able to meet other people with whom they have a common bond—age and language (Yiddish and Russian). There are 32 Russians in this program which provides lunch, health care, recreation and English classes. JFSA has also initiated a group for Russian grandmothers to gain an understanding of their needs and integration into the community.

Client Satisfaction with Adjustment

Under this category, we asked four different questions:

1. How did the family perceive their adjustment to the Cleveland Jewish community? Good? Satisfactory? Poor? The client's answers were based on their definitions and understanding of these terms.

2. Had they ever thought of moving to another city?

3. If it were possible, would the family want to return to the Soviet Union?

4. Whom would the family contact if they had a problem—relatives, friends, Jewish Family Service, or no one?

These questions being posed by an agency representative may have elicited answers skewed by the identity of the questioner, but nevertheless afford some ideas about how the Russians really feel. 70 percent of the families felt their adjustment was good; 22 percent, satisfactory; and 8 percent, poor. Only 26 percent of the 148 families indicated that at

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 186.

some point they had thought of moving to another city.

There were strong reactions to the questions about returning to the Soviet Union. Almost all the families answered with not merely, "No"—but, emphatic "Never!" One aged woman said she wanted to return. She had expected her adult children to follow her to Cleveland, but they were not allowed to leave the Soviet Union. She felt alone and isolated from her family.

In response to "Whom would the family contact if they had a problem?" 72 percent of the families said they would contact the Jewish Family Service along with family and friends. As families discussed the choices, it was apparent that many looked to the agency for tangible assistance—financial or medical. They tended to see their contract with the agency as a short-term one, relating to their initial settlement. We found numerous examples of families in need of help but who had not contacted us. We were able to provide assistance once we learned of the existence of the problems. Of the 120 families who had been in Cleveland less than three years, 51 percent, or 61 families, are active with the agency. Of those families who have been in Cleveland three years or more, only 21 percent are active. These are mainly families with aged or disabled members.

Conclusion

The interviews with Soviet families who have come to Cleveland have provided us with helpful insights about their absorption into our community. We found signs of progress in their economic and language skills with hopes of continued development. Families themselves had come to the realization that their adjustment required time and were not as hostile or depressed as one might have imagined. Even in situations where the initial resettlement had been quite difficult, families welcomed us. The majority of interviews were conducted in homes where families welcomed us with warmth and enthusiasm. We were not able to leave without being served refresh-

⁹ Erik Erikson, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

¹⁰ Hedrick Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-152.

ments by our hosts. In one day, a staff member was offered three lunches by three families and the time of day was of no consequence. We all gained a better understanding of the warmth and openness of the Russians as people.

The most positive aspect of our experience was observing and hearing about the desire of these families to become part of the Jewish community. Many of the families had brought with them from the Soviet Union some sense of Jewish identity and a desire, whether explicit or submerged, to be recognized as Jews. This could only aid in their resettlement.

Dr. Maria Pfister-Ammende of the World Mental Health Association points out:

There are always two poles involved in any process of resettlement, and the manner in which they come together will have a decisive effect upon the relations of the parties concerned. The success of resettlement therefore, will depend on whether the new settlers and the inhabitants of the country clash in a violent impact, embittered, mute and tense, or whether they meet in a spirit of friendliness.¹²

Our experience seems to confirm Dr. Pfister-Ammende's statement. We have been able to resettle large numbers of Soviet Jews based on our understanding of their needs and their desire to become part of the Cleveland Jewish community. Their move toward integration rather than isolation reflects the commonality of Jewish identity which this group of Soviets brings with them to a community with its own Jewish identity. Although there was an initial clash of cultures, there are healthy signs that this immigrant population longs for a deeper involvement in the Jewish community. They see themselves as Jews. Have we hopefully imagined this or is it true?

¹² Dr. Maria Pfister-Ammende, "Uprooting and Resettlement as a Sociological Problem" in *Uprooting and Resettlement*, London: World Federation for Mental Health, 1960, p. 22.

We selectively invited 14 immigrants to attend an informational and educational meeting about the Cleveland Jewish Welfare Fund Drive. The meeting was held at a lay leader's home and all of those invited came to the meeting. After much active discussion about community services and how Jewish community funds were utilized, the participants wanted to continue with how they could be helpful. One individual surprised us all by suggesting that they (the Russians) should reach out to their friends and other Russians to participate in the community's efforts to raise funds for Jewish needs. After this meeting, three more parlor meetings were planned by the people themselves and a total of 47 Soviet individuals were contacted for the Jewish Welfare Fund Drive. For a group who had little or no experience with voluntary fund-raising by an organized Jewish community, they reacted with a desire to be involved and to help. These meetings came at the end of the campaign and will lead to more planning for next year. Also, further efforts will be planned on a community level to offer opportunities to Soviet families for community involvement and responsibility.

We have only touched the surface of trying to understand the motivations, goals, and attitudes of the Russian population. Our experience has shown us the need for deeper and more systematic research into the adjustment and attitudes of the Soviet immigrants.

Who can say what amount of time the resettlement process takes? There will always be individuals who adjust and are absorbed quickly and those who are at the lower end of the spectrum. The Russians have shown us their hopes and frustrations, and have given us encouragement for the future. This group of people is not lost to the Cleveland Jewish community. They want to be part of the mainstream of Jewish life.

Some Techniques for Evaluating Planned Community Change in an Israeli Development Town

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. . . if a planning unit is to be initiated in any local community, it is excellent policy that the activity be subject to independent evaluation at regular periods. It is equally vital that some form of baseline measurement of conditions be established before the project is activated . . .

Introduction

Evaluating community development projects is one of the most difficult aspects of social research. The problems involve such basics as identifying agreed upon project goals, developing measurable criteria for change, defining what is in fact to be measured, and demonstrating causality. Furthermore, such evaluation must be undertaken within realistic time, budgetary, and manpower limitations. Despite these difficulties, no reasonable approach to community planning can have any justification without objective evaluation.

In this paper, we shall present a number of techniques developed and implemented by the authors to evaluate planned community change in an Israeli development town. A few findings, primarily in footnotes, are used to illustrate these techniques.

The Community Setting

Or-Yehuda, the community under discussion, is a town of over 12,000 population. It grew out of five transit camps for new immigrants, in three abandoned Arab villages, to which some of Israel's early immigrants were directed. It became a "Local Council" in 1955. It is located in what today is the greater Tel-Aviv Metropolitan Area, not distant from suburbs, satellite cities, and other towns and villages. Like many development towns, Or-Yehuda has long had to contend with severe social and communal problems. It has also been plagued with a persistent difficulty in attracting professional personnel to staff its services.

At the invitation of the Ministry of Social Welfare and as part of a United Nations consultation program in community development, Dr. Meyer Schwartz of the University of Pittsburgh studied conditions in Or-Yehuda.¹ His report of August 1968, recommending a demonstration community development project, was approved by an inter-ministry committee for social services. In August 1969, it was decided to establish a Social Planning Service in the community. It was to formulate, as well as to implement and coordinate, short-term and long-term programs and policies.

Background

When attempting to evaluate the impact of a four-year social planning effort in Or-Yehuda, the researchers had to take a number of factors into account. Five such factors are described below:

The Planning Model in Or-Yehuda

Susan and Norman Fainstein, in their article "City Planning and Political Values," categorize a number of planning activities which are helpful in understanding what took place in Or-Yehuda. Among their various types, they identify *traditional* planning.² Based on

¹ Meyer Schwartz, *Or-Yehuda—A New Immigrant Development Satellite Town in the Conurbation of Tel Aviv-Yafo* (Jerusalem: Ministry of Social Welfare, Aug. 20, 1968), Mimeo.

² Susan S. Fainstein and Norman I. Fainstein, "City Planning and Political Values," *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, 6 (March 1971), 341-362.

Â€. I. (immigrant from Former Soviet Union, female), a journalist and past advisor to the Minister of Immigrant Absorption, asserts:
Â“Integration occurs when people accept you for your personal abilities, when your career isn’t influenced by your accent. That’s the basis of integration. Â...when a person has the freedom to choose whether or not to change as s/he wishes and not because of some outside demand. Integration means to be accepted as Â“one of usÂ” But in Israel only one doctrine exists Â— of uniformity.Â Because of limited informal contact at the personal level, integration of the immigrants is blocked and social solidarity is impaired. A. M. applies the same socio-psychological approach to the terror attack at the Dolphinarium Disco club in 2001, explaining