

‘Go West, Young Man’!? Internal migration in Germany between reunification and economic crisis

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Nikola Sander

*Vienna Institute of Demography of the Austrian Academy of Sciences
& Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital, Vienna, Austria*

Address: Wohllebengasse 12-14, 6th floor
A-1040 Vienna, Austria

Email: nikola.sander@oeaw.ac.at

Phone: +43 1 51581 7738

ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, two seemingly substantial shifts in the patterns of internal migration ignited an intense scientific and public debate about the possible causes and consequences of regional population change: East-West migration and reurbanisation. Using a unique new dataset that holds annual interregional migration counts drawn from the population register for 397 regions with temporally consistent boundaries, this paper aims to provide a more comprehensive picture of the spatial structure of inter-county migration in Germany and how it has changed over the period 1995 – 2010. By visualizing changes in the structure of internal migration flows over the 15-year period 1995-2010 in a novel and indeed beautiful way using Circos, new insights are gained into the impact of reunification and economic prosperity on East-West migration and reurbanization. Contrary to common expectation, recent population decline in East German rural regions is driven to a substantial degree by out-migration to the East German cities of Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden, rather than by migration to the West. Over the last decade, several East German cities have become attractive destinations not only for young adults but also for families. Across Germany, cities experience renewed population growth, a trend that appears to be driven at least in part by a cessation of the long-term trend of family out-migration to the cities’ suburban and non-metropolitan hinterlands.

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