

Returning Back Home? Ethnic German late repatriates remigration

Types and motivations

Michael Schoenhuth, Trier University, Germany

Introduction

Repatriates of German origin are persons from the countries of the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact who had faced persecution and serious discrimination due to their German ethnicity in the course and still years after the end of World War II. For this reason they have been allowed to settle in Germany, along with non-German family members, under a special program, the so called “Federal Expellees Act” (BVFG) from 1953. *Ius sanguinis* (the principle of blood) accords citizenship on the basis of ethnicity. All those who are able to demonstrate German ancestry are automatically granted German citizenship. Up to 1992, it was assumed that all ethnic Germans living in these areas had personally suffered discrimination due to their ethnicity. The same applied to applicants from the successor states of the former Soviet Union even after 1993. All other applicants since then must demonstrate evidence of individual discrimination.¹ Today 3.9 Mio. repatriates and relatives live in Germany, thereby building not only the biggest group with a migratory background in Germany but in the whole of Europe.

To smoothen integration, and on the other side bring down the number of German repatriates the government has launched a bundle of legal and administrative measures – alas with limited success. Missing or incompatible professional qualifications, German language deficiencies, incompatible job descriptions, but also the upgrading economic situation in the countries of origin foster return migration strategies. Estimations speak of 10.000 to 12.000 in the last three years, by this building the biggest single group of voluntary return migration in Germany.

Who are these people? What are their motivations and what types of remigration can be observed? Our research project at the university of Trier, launched half a year ago, focuses on the different factors that influence German repatriates (double) remigration strategies: on a political-structural level, on the level of external motivating factors, and on the level of individual, social and symbolic resources

In the following presentation I will sketch out the historical and political background for German repatriate immigration, then coming to the changing political and economic conditions for repatriates here in Germany from 1990 to today and those in Russia, the main country of return migration. These changing conditions build the frame wherein ideas of return migration sprout and return strategies are shaped.

I then will present preliminary results on expressed motivations and types of return migration, drawn from a sample of 150 return cases, accomplished in the only counseling centre dedicated to returning German repatriates between 2005 and 2007.

¹ http://www.zuwanderung.de/nn_1070222/EN/ImmigrationPast/Ethnic/ethnic__node.html?__nnn=true.

I hope to show, that neoclassical theories of migration can contribute to an explanation of return migration, but they are far from being sufficient in painting the complex picture of motivations of German repatriates remigrating again.

The Background

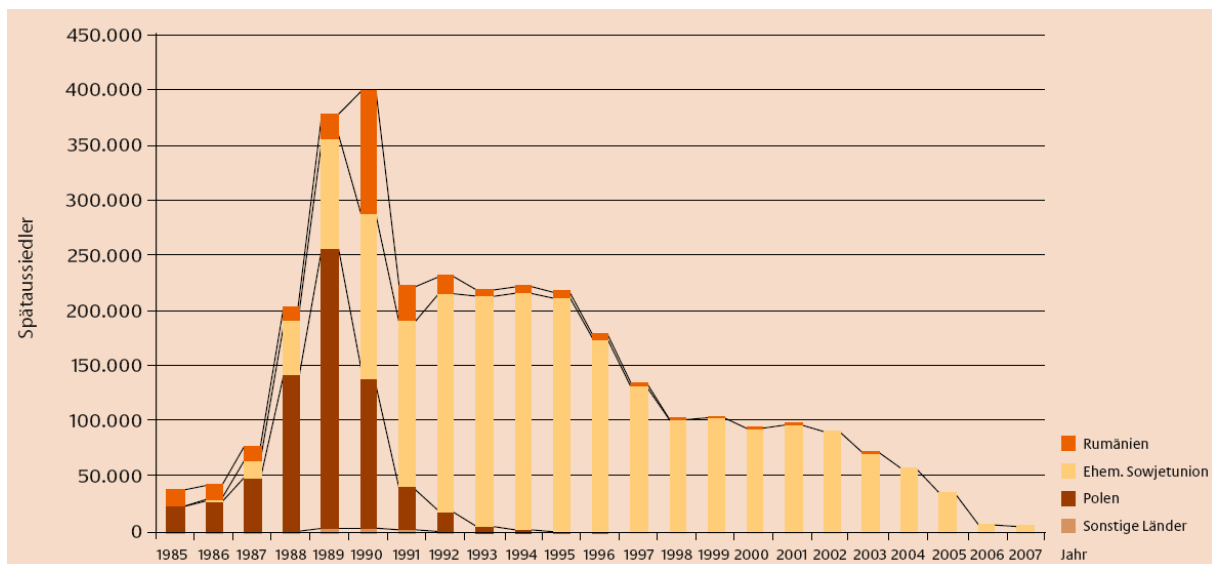
Ethnic German resettlement to Germany came in three waves:

- The immediate post War time period during which an estimated 8 million expellees were granted German citizenship
- The Cold-War era coinciding with the adoption of the 1953 „Law of return“ until the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989
- The post-Cold war period to the present, a time during which major changes in the 1953 Law of return took place

(Harris 1999:19; vgl. Delfs 1993; Groenendijk 1996; 1999).

Due to heavy travel-restrictions and the iron curtain the number of ethnic Germans resettling in Germany between 1945 and 1988 did not exceed an average of 15.000 per year. This changed with Gorbachev's perestrojka politics. Between 1986 and 1989 the average amounted to 175,000 per year. In an effort to control that flow, German government established and revised application procedures between 1990 and 2005:

How these regulating measures in the last period influenced the yearly figures can be demonstrated with the following chart. They dwindled steadily from a peak of 400.000 in 1990 to a number of only round 6.000 in 2007:



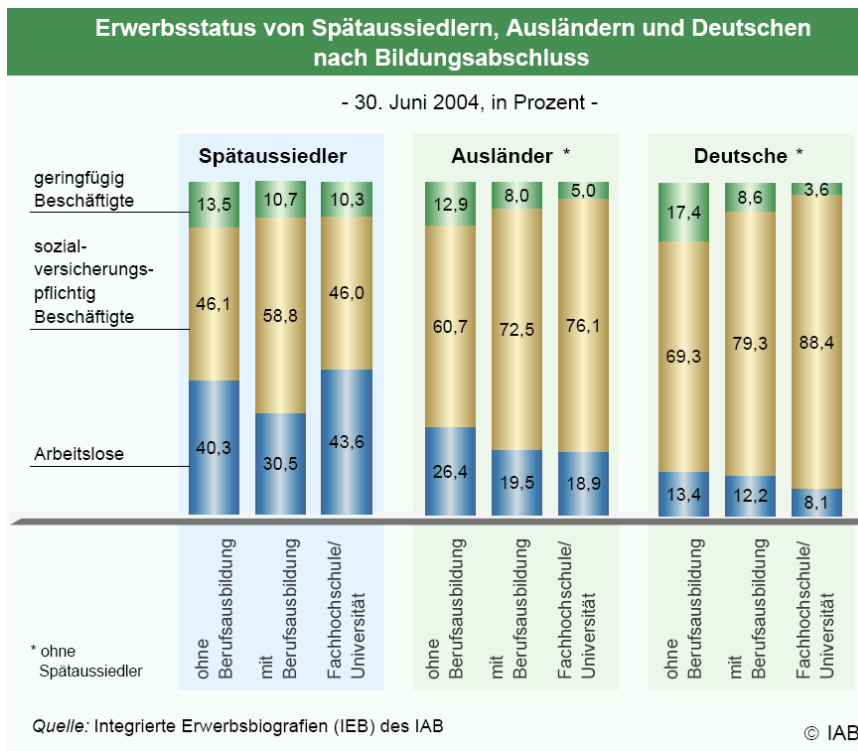
Source: Bundesverwaltungsamt 2008

Push factors in Germany

While the formal political inclusion is completed with the allocation of German citizenship and therefore comprises all legitimate repatriates and families living in Germany, the social and economic inclusion is far from being satisfying. The willingness to integrate the late

German repatriates declined in the 1990s. One reason was the pure number of repatriates who immigrated at that time into a country which faced a more and more economically strained situation, where people competed for jobs. Also the number of „late repatriates“ by their own right has diminished. With every “genuine” late repatriate three members who could not demonstrate German roots, cultural traits or language skills, joined . More and more late repatriates were perceived as ethnically strange (“Russians”) by the host community. The “late repatriates” themselves do partly react with increasing strategies of ingroup-favorising, and building of closed ethnic colonies.

Looking on the job market it can be stated that late-repatriates are worst off. While one out of five foreigners in Germany is unemployed, this counts for nearly one out of three late repatriates (IAB 2006). And many of those who are employed, hold down low-paid or part-time jobs. 36% per cent do not have a completed vocational education. Even more alarming is the fact, that repatriates with a university degree face the highest proportion of unemployment of all groups:



Therefore it seems not astonishing that more and more repatriates think about exit strategies.

An empirical case study pursued with 400 late-repatriate respondents in Berlin-Marzahn in 2006 (Haupt-Wockenfuß 2007) showed, that only 60 % are more or less satisfied with their live in Germany.

Dissatisfaction was voiced concerning one’s own future prospects and the proportion between income and development of prices. The biggest fears instead were expressed, to be „handled like second-class citizens“, or to be harrassed as undesirable aliens by the resident German population. This argues for a tremendous antagonism between political and social inclusion of late repatriates in Germany.

All in all only 50 % of the respondents indicated, that their aspirations of life in Germany have not been fulfilled; the highest proportions being found with women and elderly people.

Notwithstanding, two thirds of the probands have decided to stay and live in Germany; 20 % intend to make the decision whether to leave or to stay subject to the further development. 1 % has already decided to leave the country and re-migrate.

Taking diversified neoclassical push-and pull models into account (f.ex. Braun /Topan 1998²) it can be stated, that of all the relevant push-factors leading to out-migration, reaching from population development over economic, social/infrastructural, political, religious-ethnic, juridical and ecological factors, only “unemployment” or low wages could be held responsible for remigration aspirations. The disappointed hope, to live as Germans amongst Germans and to be accepted not only politically but socially, cannot be covered by these models.

Pull-Factors in the countries of origin

Return migration considerations are fostered by the fact, that in the countries of origin – mainly Russia and Kazhastan – at least before the financial crises in the recent past – a tremendous economic boom could be stated.



Boom-town St. Petersburg

Special economic zones have been established in various areas and remigration and compatriots policies have been launched in both countries. “The subject of return migration is especially current since beginning of the Russian States Compatriots Programme valid from 2006-2012. One of the aims of the programme is to attract people of working age to regions which had lost population during the period of economic instability between 1990 - 2000, especially in Siberia and the Far East. Currently practically all regions are developing programmes for work with remigrated fellow countrymen.

As pull-factors one could designate a stagnation of population in the target regions, a lack of qualified workforce, competitive wages, functioning immigration policies and legal security. Although the prospects seem good the programmes, show a low acceptance up till now. Partly this is owing to the extreme bureaucratic procedures associated with the programmes. But the

² Lee, Everett S. (1972): Eine Theorie der Wanderung, in: György Széll (Hrsg.), Regionale Mobilität. München, 115-129. Braun, Gerald/Topan, Angelina (1998): Internationale Migration. Ihre Folge für die Ursprungsländer und Ansätze eines Migrationsregimes. Interne Studie der Konrad-Adenauer- Stiftung Nr. 153, Sankt Augustin. (vgl. Borchers 2007)

statement of a deputy director of a German-Russian house in a big Siberian town with returning repatriates reveals other reasons:

“We have returning migrants living here, but some of them still don't have accommodation. In soviet times they might have received it for free but that isn't the case any more. And I say, well what do you expect? If there's a good teacher living here, on the waiting list for a flat. And then suddenly a foreigner arrives, and you really are a foreigner even if you still have your passport,...you've come from another country, what do you think? Who will they give housing to first? It's exactly the same thing with work. If you were working in Germany and you are still a first class professional - of course they'll take you..... But even if, ten or so years ago when they left they were good doctors or engineers, firstly the requirements for those professions have changed. And secondly, they haven't worked in those fields for ten years. I don't think employers are likely to take them back into the same positions that they had. They probably have to change their status - and that's not always easy. Some people find it humiliating ...” (Kaiser 2009:56)

It seems that returning repatriates may be trapped again, their professional skills being devaluated a second time. Nonetheless messages of resettling projects spread also in Germany. In Novosibirsk Oblast for example there is a commercial house-building project for Russian Germans called "Alekseevka" (<http://www.alexeevka.ru>). According to its creator, the project is planned for up to 20.000 inhabitants, and has already received 700 applications from potential home buyers in Germany (in April 2007). Another example would be the organization Neuland in Paraguay (<http://neuland-paraguay.net>), who has bought vast potential farmland areas in Paraguay, where settlers can rent or buy land and cultivate crops and macadamia nuts. 250 families already moved there. Both projects are privately organized and do heavy advertising in the relevant media for Russian speaking ex-patriates in Germany and via Internet.

Empirical Evidence

Given, that pull and push factors do play a role in making a 'rational choice', a lot can be won by using a more complex model, in understanding and explaining re-migration motivations and strategies of German repatriates in the new century. What we need, is a multi-level approach, taking into account individual, social and symbolic resources and aspirations, and a multi-sited approach, which captures transnational networks and follows our 'moving targets' on their journeys across borders (Schoenhuth 2008).

A good empirical basis, to start with, are self-statements of return migrants. In a first empirical approach, my colleague Galina Suppes made a content analysis of self statements given in 150 counseling cases of persons or families willing to return. They have been accomplished in the only counseling centre for returning German repatriates between 2005 and 2007. To round up this presentation I will present preliminary results on expressed motivations of return and types of return migration, drawn from this sample. (Percentages give the ratio of respective statements given in the case documents)

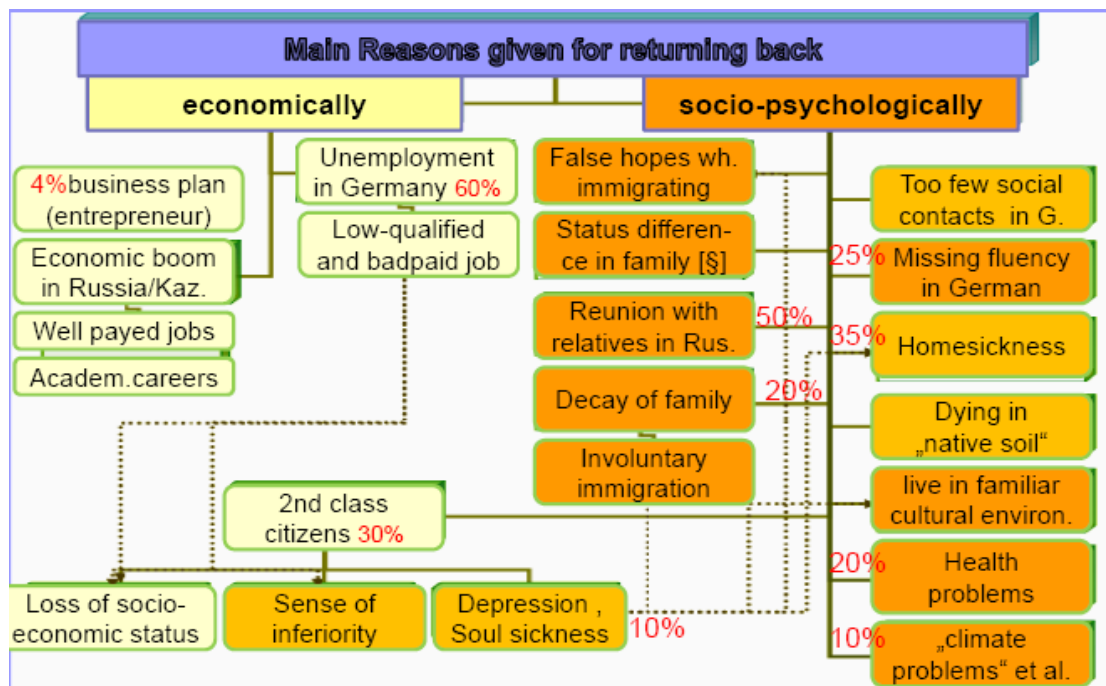


Fig n: Main motivations for return, given in 150 cases of ethnic Germans, willing to return to their countries of emigration

Immigration to Germany almost always was planned as “final home migration”. This is supported by the vast literature on German late repatriates immigration between 1990 and 2008. This is also supported by the fact, that in most emigration cases houses have been sold in the countries of origin, and whole families have been chain migrating over years to Germany. Labour migration – if at all – stood not in the center of the immigration of late repatriates to Germany. →from ethnic minority to diaspora]³

Looking at the re-migration of German late repatriates, we may discern two basic types

1. “Final” return migration:

- the old/heavily sick/retired: (“retirement migration”; support by family members who have not migrated)
- family reunion of those who only migrated to Germany to the will of other family members (youth, non-German spouses...);
- persons “revaluing” skills (academic degrees downvalued in Germany; German basic degrees up-graded in Russia)

³ [Familiennachzugsmigration → letztere ist der zahlenstärkste Migrationstyp überhaupt; vgl. Angenendt 2005; keine!: Arbeitskäftemigration <-> Gastarbeiter); keine Fluchtmigration im engeren Sinne; obwohl, bedingt in Kasachstan Ende der 1990er (ethnische Pogrome befürchtet) http://www.bpb.de/themen/1AW5S0,0,0,Formen_der_Migration.html). Folge: kaum mehr geschlossene Siedlungsgebiete;

- depressed and deprived (highly emotional but somehow ‘non-rational’ decisions to move back. Motto: “I must only get out of here!”)

2. Transnational forms of (temporary?) return migration:

- “entrepreneurs”
- splitted families
- inofficial and irregular types
- ;
- Remigration bei den Alten/Kranken/Rentnern endgültig angelegt (Familienzusammenführung in der alten Heimat); ebenso bei den “Deprivierten”, und denen, die in der alten Heimat bessere beruflichen Anschluss/Aufstiegsmöglichkeiten haben.
- Bei den anderen bilden sich unter Nutzung der faktischen Doppelpassmöglichkeit, der erleichterten Transportwege und zunehmender wirtschaftlicher und sozialer Vernetzungsprozesse neue Migrationsformen heraus: entweder transnational angelegt (Teil der Familie hier, Teil dort), von vorn herein temporär (wegen Doppelpass begrenzt möglich, bis auf Passverlängerung) inoffiziell: zirkulär (Doppelpass) oder irregulär (Wiedereinreise nach Deutschland wegen Doppelpass möglich; kaum nachprüfbar)

Against all other migrant-groups, the construction of sameness, symbolized in the handing over of the German passport after the immigration, stands at the beginning, not at the end of the integration process of German repatriates. If this collective narrative – supported by German politics until recently (cf. German Aussiedlerbeauftragter 2008) – is shattered, and only formal inclusion is offered, concepts of return migration gain momentum.