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# Ghettos in Small Towns? The Research on Ethnic Segregation and Stigmatisation Processes in Small Town Germany

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# Ghettos in Small Towns?

## The Research on Ethnic Segregation and Stigmatisation Processes in Small Town Germany

by René Kreichauf

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### 1. Introduction

The research of segregation is considered to be the origin of urban sociology. Because segregation is mainly explained as a big-city phenomenon and the metropolis serves as a research paradigm of modern urbanism, smaller towns are often neglected in urban and segregation research. The special characteristics of rural regions in regards to migration and integration are rarely discussed. Moreover, there is a lack of comprehensive academic, theoretical and empirical analyses investigating the specific integration conditions and processes in German small towns [Boos-Krüger 2005]. However, unnoticed by politics and research, immigration has increased in rural areas in Germany in the past decades. Late repatriates<sup>1</sup> of German origin have especially migrated to rural regions in the 1980s and 1990s. Currently, immigration to small-

<sup>1</sup> Repatriates of German origin are persons from the countries of the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact who faced persecution and serious discrimination due to their German ethnicity in the course and 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 programme. This programme is called the “Federal Expellees Act” (BVFG) from 1953. Up to 1992, it was assumed that all ethnic Germans living in the mentioned 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. Since then, all other applicants have to demonstrate evidence of individual discrimination. Today, there are 3,9 millions repatriates and relatives who live in Germany. They not only built the biggest group with a migratory background in Germany but in the whole of Europe [Schoenhuth 2010].

and middle-sized towns is growing. Cities and communes of peripheral areas are increasingly confronted with integration demands and conditions [IRS/ILS 2010].

In various current studies [see for example Roth 2009], there are findings showing that the contrasts between cities and rural regions are declining in regards to settlement structures and the composition of the population. Thence, segregation is a process, which might occur in all types of cities and settlements but in different variations depending on the socio-economic structure of the population, the size of the city and the ethnic composition of the city's inhabitants. The comprehensive German study, "Integrationspotentiale von kleinen Städten und Landkreisen" (Potentials of Integration in Small Cities and Counties), argues that the research on processes of segregation is becoming more significant for the analysis of the integration of immigrants in small towns, as it is assumed that the job market is losing its integrating qualities, and, therefore, neighbourhoods, living conditions and neighbourhood institutions gain in importance for the integration process [IRS/ILS 2010].

This paper is based on a qualitative study on ethnic segregation in German small towns. It gives an overview on the current state of research on ethnic segregation in small towns and puts the urban phenomenon of segregation in the context of small towns using a case study of Genthin, a small town in Saxony Anhalt, Germany. The study encompassed three methods: 1) (local) policy research on immigration and integration strategies; 2) expert and focus group interviews<sup>2</sup> on the levels of political and administrative bodies, key holders as well as migrants and neighbourhood residents; and 3) spatial analyses of immigrant neighbourhoods. This article illustrates the local conditions and tendencies of segregation, its causes, its characteristics and its perception by different groups within the town's society. Furthermore, this work suggests methods for the analysis of ethnic segregation in small towns. The study of these topics is intended to provide a clear understanding of the primary argument of this paper, namely that the process of ethnic segregation in German small towns seems to express itself in a different dimension in comparison to big cities. The appearance and ongoing development of segregation in a neighbourhood in the case study are not only determined by macro-social factors and trends but are rather substantially affected by local practices, political decisions and also by the perceptions and views of the small town society. This intense scrutiny of the neighbourhood produces a stigmatisation of the neighbourhood and its residents, which highly influences the quality of segregation and the integration process of immigrants.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpts from the interviews will be quoted in the following paragraphs, translated into English. Interviewees will be identified by their role/position and by the year the interview was held.

## 2. The Small Town as a Research Object in German Urban Studies

In German urban studies, migration and segregation are topics that have been associated with big cities and, thus, they have been investigated in metropolises. Friedrich's and Herlyn's early works significantly shaped German segregation research since the 1970s. Currently, there is a strong lack of extensive and systematic analyses, case studies and reports on the settlement patterns of immigrants [IRS/ILS 2010, 74]. Only for some big cities are there detailed data and research on segregation [see for example Blasius, Friedrichs and Klöckner 2008; Friedrichs and Triemer 2009; Schulz and Kapphan 2000]. Even though 54 per cent of the German population lives in middle-sized and small towns with more than 5,000 and less than 100,000 inhabitants [IRS/ILS 2010] – thus, the dominant German city type is not the metropolis – there are only a handful of theoretical and empirical studies concerning small towns, their characteristics and migration processes [Herrenknecht and Wohlfahrt 2003].

In the 1950s, there was a heyday of small town and community studies in German urban sociology [Kolb 2007]. In the so-called "Gemeindestudien" (community studies), small towns were understood as a "societal microcosm" because of their considerate unity of the local community. Hence, the small town was paradigmatically illustrated to study general questions of sociological research; the findings were generalised on a macro-social level [Häußermann and Siebel 2004]. Further, community studies focus on the analysis of social orders and hierarchies as well as on social interactions and relations. Interestingly, the prominent German community studies [for example: Croon and Utermann 1958; Friedrichs 2002] discuss the development of small towns focussing on social transformations due to immigration. Friedrichs [2002] describes conflicts between the inhabitants and immigrants, arguing that these contentions are strongly linked to the structure of small- and middle-sized towns as such. Also, Croon and Utermann [1958] explain the separation of the "lifeworlds" of immigrants and natives, which is spatially manifested: both groups have different places of work, living and leisure activities [Häußermann 1994].

In the passing years – especially since Germany's reunification – there is a renaissance of small town studies focussing on the political, social and economic transformation in East Germany [Häußermann and Siebel, 2004]. Hannemann [2004], as well as Schäuble and Grüger [2005], undertake spatial differentiations and characteristics of small towns in comparison to big cities, which potentially ease the integration process: strong cultural and economic traditions, close social networks and civic engagement often characterise small towns. Hüttermann's [2010] study on conflict situations between locals and immigrants in small towns explains the development and causes of conflicts between these groups. He comprehensively illustrates the de-

velopment of a segregated neighbourhood and the small town society's perception of it. In his case studies, immigration results in conflicts in small towns, which are also translated in the spatial manifestation of ethnic inequalities. Boos-Krüger [2005] offers a detailed finding on the socio-spatial integration of migrants in small- and middle-sized towns in rural areas. A more recent study investigates small towns' opportunities and conditions in integrating in rural areas. On the basis of twelve case studies, the study concludes that, in almost all of the case studies, there are tendencies of the socio-spatial concentration of migrants that often result in a failed integration process [ILS/IRS 2010].

### **3. Immigration to German Small Towns**

After the Second World War, refugees from former occupied German territories, including guest workers ("Gastarbeiter"), asylum seekers and late repatriates, have predominantly characterised immigration to Germany as well as rural areas. National migration acts and regulations on each of these groups have significantly affected immigrant geographies and the localisation of immigrants, resulting in the growth of immigrant populations outside of traditional destinations. Refugees from pre-war occupied German territories especially settled in rural areas due to the lack of housing in war-damaged big cities, often resulting in the development of new settlements for migrants on the edge of existing towns. At the beginning, this group had hard times integrating into the German host society because of different languages, traditions and socialisation processes. However, the German "economic miracle" of the 1950s and 1960s eased the way for economic integration [Boos-Krüger 2005].

In constant need for labour power, migrants from Italy, Spain, Greece, the former Yugoslavia and Turkey immigrated in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s due to Germany's recruitment agreement with these countries [IRS/ILS 2009]. This politically induced migration and *demand-driven localisation* was initially concentrated in big cities. However, because of the direct recruitments of companies located in small- and middle-sized towns, the number of immigrants in small towns has especially risen since the 1960s [Boos-Krüger 2005]. Additionally, some of the recruitment agreements – for example, with Italy – contained requirements on the employers' responsibility to provide housing for their guest workers. As a result, companies often built camps on greenfield sites and/or in close proximity to the workplaces and, thus, mostly out of or at the edge of big cities [Rieker 2003]. The ban on recruitment in 1973 limited migration to Germany but led to family reunion as well as the *network driven localisation* [Luft 2011], thus resulting in the further growth of immigrants in

small towns. Also, the former GDR had recruitment agreements with socialist countries such as Hungary, Poland, Algeria, Cuba, Mozambique and Vietnam, but on a smaller level than in West Germany. Migrants were distributed to small towns with agricultural and industrial enterprises.

In the 1980s, migration to West Germany was characterised by asylum seekers and civil war refugees as well as late repatriates. Compared to former immigrants, these migrant groups have been decentrally distributed to the German states (“Länder”) and finally to the local level of the communes on the basis of allocation keys. Due to the German reunification and the fall of the Soviet Union, the number of late repatriates migrating to Germany increased. Referring to Wierling [2004], the main objective for this group was to secure better living conditions in a prosperous country. To regulate this migration, the “Wohnortzuweisungsgesetz” (residence assignment act) was established in 1996. The law’s objective was to equally distribute repatriates to the German Länder and regions on the basis of quota by the Federal Administration Office [Miksch and Schwier 2001], and it contained an obligatory three-year residency at the distributed location. Repatriates were forced to move to the distributed city, where they were initially housed in a temporary mass accommodation centre until they found their own apartments. Interestingly, this act clearly restricted the freedom of movement of the late repatriates and contradicted article 11, paragraph 1 of the Basic Law, which states, “All Germans have the right to move freely throughout the federal territory” – and, by law, late repatriates are Germans.

Also, asylum seekers – the second central immigration group of the late 1980s and 1990s – have been allocated to the Länder and finally to the communes based on the “Königssteiner Schlüssel.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the residential obligation for asylum seekers (part of the Asylum Procedure Act) has dramatically affected migration patterns until 2015. The temporary permission to stay was limited to the commune, where the alien’s registration authority in charge of the individual asylum application is located. Consequently, this residential obligation has limited the spatial mobility of asylum seekers who are not allowed to leave the allocated district [Schader-Stiftung, 2011].

These distribution policies and residence assignments for both of the migrant groups have three major consequences: Firstly, they have resulted in a *forced localisation* of immigrants to regions and communes, which they did not choose as a destination. Secondly, German small towns have experienced an increase of immigrant population due to this forced allocation. Small- and middle-sized towns have developed

<sup>3</sup>The Königssteiner Schlüssel is an allocation formula that defines the numbers of certain immigrants, for example, late repatriates and asylum seekers, which each German state has to receive.

to new (forced) destinations of immigrants. And, thirdly, such a forced allocation has resulted in small- and middle-sized towns – and especially their social housing sectors – representing *stop overs* for repatriates and asylum seekers for the obligatory stay in the allocated city. Keller [2005] states that in the 1990s “collecting tanks” for repatriates and asylum seekers developed, resulting into segregation in social housing apartments of small towns. After this obligation, however, a lot of migrants moved away; economically weak and immobile households remained [Keller 2005].

The implementation of allocation policies and residential obligations aimed to prevent the “problematic conglomeration,” an assumed disintegration due to the possible (voluntary) concentration and development of inclusive living conditions due to the (forced) separation of migrants [BVerfG 2004; Lakizjuk 2008; Strasser and Zdun 2006].<sup>4</sup> Further, these restrictive policies are not only instruments to regulate migration, but their more hidden objective is to prevent and reduce immigration by systematically discouraging immigrants [Neef 1998, referring to late repatriates; Kreichauf 2015, referring to asylum seekers]. Consequently, the influx of late repatriates dropped after the implementation of the residence assignment act (and other regulations) from 177,751 in 1996 to 103,080 in 1998 [BAMF 2010].

Referring to Light [2006], who studies immigration in Los Angeles, the regulation and restrictive (in his case: urban) policies consequently develop to a “deflected immigration” to other cities and regions. He explains the decline in popularity of traditional immigrant destinations and argues that, in his case study, the region’s political economy and regulatory environment have begun to transform in the 1980s and 1990s from a region that accommodated immigrants, including poor immigrants most importantly, to one that was especially intolerant towards economically weak immigrants. Light states that workplace-exploitation cases and growing antipoverty and anti-slum activism have initiated a new regime of “poverty intolerance,” resulting in the fact that Los Angeles effectively made it harder for poorer immigrants to get a foothold.

In this context, the ban of recruitment symbolised a significant paradigm shift in German immigration policy, which developed from a demand-driven and (economically) “needed” and promoted immigration of the 1950s and 1960s to regulative and restricted immigration policies since the 1980s. As in Light’s [2006] case, this change is strongly connected to the economic transformation of Germany’s economy and to the development of discourses on “poverty migration” and abuse of the social welfare

<sup>4</sup> However, this study illustrates that allocation and residential obligation policies promoted (forced) small-scale segregation processes of the group of late repatriates, thus dramatically affecting their integration process and the stigmatisation of them.

systems since the 1970s. The group of asylum seekers and late repatriates were/are perceived as a burden to society and the German welfare state [Höfling-Semnar 1995; Kreichauf 2015]. In comparison to the guest workers – which were “wanted” by the society and economy due to their labour power in times of economic prosperity – late repatriates and asylum seekers have migrated to Germany in an epoch of economic transition, high unemployment and the transformation from the welfare to the workfare state [Wacquant 2010]. This migration was not promoted, but by (national and international) law, Germany had to accept it.

A significant outcome of the national and federal regulation of immigration in Germany is that immigrants were *deflected* to non-traditional migrant destinations and also to small towns. Rural regions have developed to forced places of immigration. Even though Light’s analysis is limited to Los Angeles and urban policies, it provides understanding for the emergence of regulatory and repressive strategies, the relation between immigration, economic transformation and neoliberal politics as well as explanations of the emergence of small towns as new immigrant destinations. However, it must be respected that Light describes more or less the passive impact of deflective migration, whereas in the case of asylum seekers and repatriates, there is an active and forced localisation of immigrants by (national) political objectives and acts. Nevertheless, his ideas of edging migrants away from the core city by restrictive and discriminative urban policies play a significant role in this article’s analysis of segregation processes of late repatriates and their consequences on the integration of this group.

#### **4. The Socio-Spatial Integration of Immigrants in Small Towns**

Concerning the small towns’ conditions in taking and integrating immigrants, Boos-Krüger [2005] states that contacts between immigrants and locals are more intense due to the small towns’ socio-spatial density and clarity as well as social interactions. The confrontation between locals and immigrants is more visible, small-scale and inevitable in daily practices. According to her, spatial and social proximity and control characterise the small town. The ILS/IRS [2010] study reports that integration conditions in rural regions have to be analysed in the context of the economic parameters and local specialties: small towns in proximity to metropolitan areas are more integrated in economic activities, while peripheral towns, especially in East Germany, are often located in structurally weak regions confronted with an economic erosion, high unemployment rates and selective migration. As a consequence, the integration into the labour market and the development of specific social infrastruc-



tures and services for migrants – for example, language classes and consulting services – are limited and more difficult. Thus, aspects of living and social networks play a more crucial role in these areas. As in big cities, the integration process of various migration groups (if there are different migration groups in small towns) is strongly differentiated. Thus, it is assumed that there are social differences between and within migrant groups depending on the duration of stay, residency status, economic and social position as well as reservations of the host society towards particular migrant groups.

However, compared to the metropolises, the local population directly experiences and perceives the integration of migrants. Migration groups are confronted with tight socio-cultural circumstances and reactions of the host society. Boos-Krüger sums up:

“In rural areas, there are intense and forced encounters between migrants and locals because of the spatial proximity” [2005, 432 (translated into English)].

In small towns, there is less anonymity. The distribution of information via face-to-face interactions and the city’s structure, services and public institutions are manageable. Further, Haug and Sauer [2007] discover that tight neighbourhood activities, associations and clubs as well as church communities, which often define the small town’s society, are often unfamiliar and strange to immigrants. However, in the public institutions of the city (schools, offices, libraries etc.), there is a mixing of population groups because the catchment area is not limited towards one district but contains the whole city area.

The IRS/ILS [2009, 19] study concludes that small towns theoretically have a great integration capacity because of their specific social and cultural shaping, spatial proximity and strong social networks. Nevertheless, those characteristics are linked to a higher degree of social control, which can have negative impacts on the integration process. On the one hand, contacts between locals and immigrants are pushed. On the other hand, the close spatial proximity and less anonymity can cause conflicts of groups being defined by different social positions and value orientations. As a result, discrimination and resentment of the host society and integration and language barriers of migrants may obstruct integration. Boos-Krüger [2005] further explains that a specific understanding of integration characterises small towns:

“Integration is seen as being successful, if the socio-cultural references and values are similar to the ones of the locals” [ibid., 434; translated into English].

Migrants are thus forced to “assimilate” into small town society, whereas the maintenance of their own cultures, cultural and social practices and morals is often negatively perceived by the host society.

In regards to a study of the BMVBS [2008], there are tendencies of the socio-spatial concentration of migrants in small towns. It argues that crucial factors for the development of segregated neighbourhoods are not only individual and group-orientated living preferences but also distribution policies of cities and public housing companies. The IRS/ILS [2010] study discovers that segregation in small towns has different spatial patterns and dimensions. The location of the small town, its socio-cultural population composition, the size and diversity of migrant groups, the history of migration and urban policies on the concentration of migrants play a significant role in the local reality of segregation and result in a “heterogeneous landscape of ethnic segregation processes” [IRS/ILS 2010, 75; translated into English]: there are concentrations of migrants in the inner city’s historical buildings, while in some small cities, there are small-scale suburbanisation processes; other migrant groups are concentrated in peripheral settlements on the edge of small towns. In regards to the group of late repatriates of German origin, national allocation acts have had a significant impact on the settlement patterns. As a result of the (forced) migration to small towns, city’s distribution policies and chain migration processes<sup>5</sup>, there is the development of ethnic-segregated areas, mostly in the rental sector [Boos-Krüger 2005, 433].

#### 4.1. *Segregation Processes in Genthin, Germany*

Genthin is located in the North-Eastern part of Saxony Anhalt, 55 km away from its capital Magdeburg and approx. 100 km away from Berlin. It has around 14,500 inhabitants and is characterised by a transition from an industrial-based economy to a mixed economic structure of small and mid-sized businesses [Bertelsmann Stiftung 2013]. Due to the German reunification and economic transformation, Genthin has experienced a great decline of industrial jobs and population. Since 1990, the small town lost 22 per cent of its residents. Low birth rates, aging, the flight of (especially the younger) population to other (and economically more prosperous) regions and suburbanisation processes characterise Genthin. More than one-fourth of inhabitants of Genthin are of pensionable age [Westermann 2009]. Consequently, Genthin has a relatively high residential vacancy rate (15 per cent),

<sup>5</sup> Within the context of this paper, the process of chain migration describes family reunification and the migration of family and friends of late repatriates to the areas of settlement of the repatriates [Haug and Sauer 2009, 32].

which is predominantly concentrated in the sector of industrialised buildings and social housing. In fact, the district “Genthin Süd” has the highest vacancy rate of 24 per cent [ibid.].

Genthin has – in relation to the national average – with 1,8 per cent, a very small share of migrants. In regards to the aliens’ registration authority, 33 per cent of Genthin’s migrants are coming from GUS-States, 13,9 per cent from Poland, 9,1 per cent from Vietnam, 8,8 per cent from Iraq, 7,4 per cent from former Yugoslavia and 5 per cent from Greece. Due to the social status of these groups and their small share, the integration of these migrants is currently not an issue in Genthin, as the major of the city argues (*Mayor of Genthin 2011*). However, the greatest migration group includes late repatriates of German origin. There are approximately 450 repatriates (2,8 per cent of the total population) living in Genthin. Unfortunately, there is very unclear data on the exact numbers of this group because they are gathered as Germans and, thus, they are not separately listed. There has been a heyday of repatriates in the 1990s. Around 2,500 migrants have lived between 1990 and 2000 in Genthin. Due to a change of the German legislation, demographic changes and the emigration of late repatriates to other regions in Germany, the number of this group has dropped in the passing years. Nevertheless, integration means in Genthin are predominantly addressed towards this group: there is an integration house, and until 2012 there was the integration project, “Genthin Power,” focussing on integrating, consulting and supporting late repatriates in the city. Nevertheless, this migrant group is under-represented in cultural, societal and leisure institutions and organisations [IRS/ILS 2009, 128].

According to the major and local housing companies, there is a socio-spatial concentration of repatriates in the rental sector of the district Genthin Süd. This neighbourhood was built between 1979 and 1989, consisting of multi-storey industrialised buildings, and it is thus the youngest prefabricate building district in Genthin [Westermann 2009]. Currently, Genthin Süd is characterised by the highest vacancy rate of the city: the number of inhabitants declined from 3,600 in 2001 to 1,900 in 2010 – the neighbourhood has lost more than 48 per cent of its residents – and every fourth apartment is vacant. Genthin Süd still has the highest population density and 14 per cent of Genthin’s population lives in that area. The loss of population is strongly linked to the loss of the district’s functions: in the passing years, numerous facilities of daily needs and leisure as well as public services have closed, while at the same time, the number of consultant agencies and social institutions has risen.



FIG. 1. Genthin Süd is spatially and symbolically separated from the city centre because of the railroad and its industrialised apartment blocks, which are in contrast to the centre's small building structures.

*Source:* Own illustration based on Google Maps

Since 1990, Genthin Süd has experienced a crucial transformation of its demographic structure. In the 1980s, it was characterised by a relative heterogeneous population. However, after the German reunification, socially strong households have left the district and moved to suburban neighbourhoods or even to more prosperous regions, while at the same time, socially weak inhabitants have remained and new households of the same or lower social status have moved to the neighbourhood but in a smaller dimension. The cycle of this selective migration process is strongly described by the city's major, who argues that:

“the ones who have been able to afford other forms of living have moved away, while at the same time poor households moved into the neighbourhood, resulting in the decline of the area's mixed population structure” (Major Genthin, 2011).

Because of the social erosion of Genthin Süd, two population groups characterise it today: the old-established (and elderly) inhabitants and the incomers. The group of incomers is further divided into two subgroups, the late repatriates and local residents. All interviewees characterise this group as socially weak, as a quote of a repatriate demonstrates:

“In Genthin Süd, there are living uneducated, unemployed and more poor people” (Late Repatriate, 2011).

For Genthin Süd, there are no detailed statistics on the demographic structures. Housing companies refused to give data on their tenants. However, they argue that

“Genthin Süd is a district, where people live, who are not able to finance other forms of living and this district is the one with the lowest rents in the city” (SWG, 2011).

This includes the elderly and established population. The late repatriates interviewed in a focus group discussion have lived in this neighbourhood for an average fifteen years. They argue that especially younger migrants moved away once they found an education or were able to afford other living conditions somewhere else. As a consequence, the number of repatriates in the neighbourhood has significantly declined from about 25 per cent in the 1990s to around 15 per cent today.

The causes for the emergence of this concentration are defined by local distribution practices, macro-social factors and the settlement behaviour of the repatriates. City's administrators, housing companies and social actors believe that a majority of Genthin's late repatriates are concentrated in Genthin Süd. The reception centre, which in the beginning housed the arriving immigrants, plays a core role in the settlement process of this group. This arrival facility existed until 2005 and had a capacity of seventy persons. It is the place of the first social contacts and the exchange of migration experiences and expertise between repatriates in the new city. This social relation and exchange of information played a crucial role in the choice of residence. The social proximity to persons with the same background eased the entrance to a new and unknown city society. Furthermore, the centre represented a place where immigrants experienced the first integration means such as language classes and orientation on the housing market. Interestingly, the administration of the centre only imparted information on the social housing market of one specific city-owned housing company, the SWG, as a repatriate remembers:

“Generally, the housemaster or the social workers always said that we have to go to the SWG to look for an apartment. But we were completely challenged. We only knew that, after six months, we had to leave the centre, but we had no information on the detailed process on how to find an apartment and what a social housing company actually is and what it does” (Late Repatriate, 2011).

The migrants were only getting information on the social housing market, not on the regular market in Genthin. Thence, the centre living had strong impacts on the segregation processes.

The inexperience and overextension of the repatriates were used to locate them only in SWG apartments, thus enforcing the socio-spatial concentration of this group. Interviews with other repatriates and also with officials prove this finding. The major argues that:

“after the centre stay, this group had to be accommodated quickly, and Genthin Süd was the neighbourhood where we had the highest rate of vacancies and thus it was the easiest way” (Major Genthin, 2011).

Since the housing company is city-owned, the town's political and administrative bodies had direct influence on the distribution of repatriates. The possibility to access apartments on the private rental market was denied. Moreover, the housing companies have other locations in the city, which are also characterised by vacancies and, thus, there are available apartments. However, a late repatriate argues that:

“We were not allowed to move somewhere else in the city. Apartments in Genthin Süd were the only ones available for us” (Late Repatriate, 2011).

Also, the major admits that:

“Yes, in the end we distributed this group to this particular neighbourhood and we also saved available apartments only for this group” (Major Genthin, 2011).

There are three reasons for the development of this distribution policy.

*a)* Genthin Süd is the district with the highest vacancy rate. Migrants were thus distributed there for economic reasons to stabilise the housing market in that neighbourhood and to guarantee the profitability of the housing company.

*b)* Administrators and the SWG aimed to avoid conflicts between locals and incomers. They argue that the distribution to other areas would have caused protests by locals, and, thus, they systematically deter repatriates to move to apartments of “stable German residents.” There was an organised isolation of late repatriates in a neighbourhood, where they live “among their own ethnic group.” Administrators and officials still believe that an equal concentration of social, ethnic and cultural population groups to different neighbourhoods would avoid conflicts and discussions.

*c)* Officials saw late repatriates as temporary residents, which would – after the expiration of the residential obligation – leave the city anyway. Consequently, political and administrative bodies decided to locate and isolate this migrant group in Genthin Süd, aiming to develop a neighbourhood of arrival and departure detached from the city's society. Genthin Süd was and still is a temporary neighbourhood itself, which is in the process of decline and denaturation since 2001.

The distribution policy has finally resulted in the discrimination and disadvantage of repatriates in the housing market. They were forced to move to a neighbourhood that experienced decay, transformation process and partial demolition with low standards and that was located on the edge of the city. A repatriate highlights this discrimination by stating:

“I was once visiting an apartment of German friends who were moving out, and I wanted to move in, but the SWG told me that only Germans lived in the building and, thus, I had no chance to rent this apartment” (Late Repatriate, 2011).

On the macro-social level, it must be verified that late repatriates were and still are limited in accessing other neighbourhoods because of their social status and income situation. Referring not only to the statements of city officials and actors but also to interviewed repatriates, it becomes apparent that they depended on social benefits after their arrival. Those who found an occupation in the passing years or after the forced residence period of three years left the neighbourhood to move to other regions. The majority of the current repatriate population, as officials argue, is socially weak and immobile and, thus, unable to access other forms of housing. A late repatriate states that she

“would prefer living in a private house, but I do not have to money, because I cannot find a job and thus I have to stay here because these are the most affordable apartments so far” (Late Repatriate, 2011).

Also, a representative of SWG argues:

“The migrants decided to live there as they were conscious of costs. They know what amount of rent they are able to pay and the apartment rent they are able to afford is in Genthin Süd” (SWG, 2011).

Thence, these findings highlight two trends: Late repatriates are (forced) to live in Genthin Süd for macro-economic and macro-social reasons and the ethnic segregation of this group is linked to their social status and, thus, to trends of social segregation.

The third cause for the development of the segregated area is the settlement behaviour of the repatriates. Due to the increase of this group migrating to Genthin after 1990 and the distribution policy of the city, Genthin Süd quite early became a neighbourhood for migrant housing. As a result, it attracted further repatriates voluntarily moving to Genthin Süd because of the presence of relatives, friends and migrant communities in general. The proximity to this community was important at the beginning of the integration process. Experiences and integration expertise were and still are exchanged due to informal networks. The SWG, the major as well as repatriates argue that repatriates, who arrived after there was already a concentration of this group, also wished to be housed in Genthin Süd, hoping for the support of their “own” community and an easier inclusion into the small town’s society (Late Repatriate, 2011; Major Genthin, 2011). Nevertheless, these settlement preferences are strongly linked to the mentioned restrictive city policies, discrimination on the housing market and socio-economic factors, thus causing and manifesting segregation tendencies.

#### 4.2. *The Stigmatisation of the Segregated Neighbourhood*

Social conflicts, xenophobic attitudes in the host society and institutional discrimination characterise the communal life of locals and repatriates in Genthin. Even though there is no strong organisation of right-wing groups, Genthin is certainly defined by hidden resentment towards foreigners. Within the study, some repatriates state that they are often treated with hostility because they speak Russian. But this form of xenophobia is not recognised by administrative bodies. There is a very limited understanding of xenophobic attitudes, which is also reflected in the officials' understanding of integration: Integration in Genthin means the assimilation of foreigners. Genthin's society negatively perceives the living of original lifestyles, traditions and languages, which results in a discrepancy between locals and immigrants. Even though the number of late repatriates has declined due to the ongoing rise in vacancy in Genthin's social housing areas and the repatriates' increasing access to other neighbourhoods in Genthin, Genthin Süd has become the city's migrant neighbourhood, which not only concentrates repatriates but also socially weak households. Hence, as the mayor of Genthin argues, this district has developed to a residential area of "socially excluded inhabitants" (Mayor Genthin, 2011).



FIG. 2. Prefabricated buildings dominate Genthin Süd.

*Source:* Own photograph.



Indeed, the majority of Genthin's approximately 450 late repatriates are located in Genthin Süd. However, there is no data on the number of residents with a migrant background who actually live in that neighbourhood. In total, Genthin Süd houses around 1,900 inhabitants. Even if all of the repatriates live in this neighbourhood, it would be a share of 23 per cent. Remarkably, all of the interviewees (including late repatriates) assumed that the share of repatriates would be between 40 and 80 per cent. This represents Genthin Süd's image of an ethnic neighbourhood and proves Dangschat's [2007a, 43] argument that the host society sees the concentration of often unwelcomed migrants as a danger, and, thus, it assumes that the numbers are higher than they actually are. Also, a social consultant in Genthin Süd argues that Genthiners tend to perceive masses of migrants as a result of xenophobia and social envy (Social Consultant, 2011).



FIG. 3. Decline of facilities for daily needs.

*Source:* Own photograph.

Furthermore, the social and spatial characteristics of Genthin Süd crucially affect its perception. It is a district being confronted with population loss, selective migration, socially weak residents, immigration, urban construction processes and a peripheral location. The host society observes the transformation of it with high attention. The intense scrutiny of the neighbourhood and its negatively perceived

transformation processes have resulted in a poor image to complicate the integration process of late repatriates.

The following features have developed and reinforced the image of the neighbourhood, resulting in the stigmatisation of it and its residents. Genthin Süd's location, south of the inner city, and its separation from other neighbourhoods due to the railroad, isolate the area. All interviewees highlight the significance of this spatial disconnection. The major argues:

“Genthin is dichotomous – not only spatially but also in the city's thinking and feeling. There is a complete different social structure in the south. They are excluded and the former unity of the city has declined” (Major Genthin, 2011).

Thence, the spatial barrier also represents a social separation. For those living in Genthin Süd, it is difficult to access the city centre; for the inner city residents, there is simply no reason to visit the south because of its lack of public and cultural institutions as a result of the district's population decline. Furthermore, Genthin Süd's shrinkage is strongly linked to the loss of urban functions, poor structural conditions and removal of residential buildings. A resident states that:

“it is more quiet; there are less people on the street and it is not lively. Especially on weekends, this neighbourhood is simply dead” (Genthin Süd Resident, 2011).

Currently, there is a discussion between political and administrative actors and the housing companies about the future of the district. Even though the housing companies state that they will maintain the neighbourhood for low-income households, the major predicts that:

“in the end, Genthin Süd will not exist anymore by 2020” (Major Genthin, 2011).

The insecure perspective of the neighbourhood and its current situation determine the image of a district in decay.

More crucially, the social climate, reservations towards migrants and social conflicts shape the stigmatisation of Genthin Süd. In the period of immigration in the 1990s, there have been conflicts between locals and repatriates; as the city's historian states:

“There were a lot of migrants who never aimed to live in Genthin; they were just distributed to this city. As a consequence, they left after two years and, thus, it has been impossible to establish a social cohesion in the city” (City Historian, 2011).

The fluctuation of the residents and the concentration of social problems are perceived as an open issue.

“Genthin Süd is a neighbourhood, where differences and conflicts are more concentrated because there is a concentration of socially weak groups competing in space and labour” (Social Consultant, 2011).

The police commissioner also reports that there is a conglomeration of high unemployment, social problems and migrants resulting in conflicts and discussions. However, he admits that there is no increase of crimes compared to other districts. Fires in the basements of some apartments further strengthen the perception of a deprived area (German: Sozialer Brennpunkt) in 2009, 2010 and 2011. Even though causes and motives are not detected, the image of a neighbourhood in flames matches the locals’ perception of a dangerous no-go area, as Genthin’s library director explains:

“People not living in this area feel insecure about these events. They think it does not happen in other parts of Genthin, only there, so it has to do something with the district and its poor residents and migrants” (Library Director, 2011).

The negative trends of the neighbourhood, a general stigmatisation of GDR industrialised buildings and events like the fires contribute to the district’s bad reputations, which are reflected in several attributions as well as negative and racist connotations. In the period of immigration to the neighbourhood in the 1990s, the terms “Small Moscow” and “Russian Ghetto” have emerged, and they are still manifested in the city’s perception of Genthin Süd, as shown in the major’s quote referring to his citizens’ image of the neighbourhood:

“This on the edge of the city is Small Moscow, and this is the area where the Russians live. You have to pay fees to Russians to enter the district because you are a German and you do not belong there” (Major Genthin, 2011).

The racist attributions are linked to several myths about Genthin Süd, for example, that there is a toll by Russians to enter the district, drug abuse etc. Due to the concentration of migrants and socially weak households, the quarter is further characterised as a “Socially Troubled Area” and a “Deprived Neighbourhood.” The representative of the SWG explains that:

“there is a difficult social environment and, thus, the neighbourhood is called a socially troubled area because there are more social conflicts than in other Genthin districts” (SWG, 2011).

However, a resident of Genthin Süd argues that she suffers from the bad reputation, stating that the inhabitants:

“are only the fifth wheel – nobody wants us and nobody needs us, and by using these terms, they let us know what they think about people living in Genthin Süd” (Late Repatriate, 2011).

Another resident describes that she often experiences situations where she feels stigmatised and discriminated by people not living in Genthin Süd. She says:

“On Saturday, I went to the cemetery and I passed a group of teenagers walking to Genthin Süd, and one of them said ‘I am going to show you a real ghetto of migrants and poor people like you know from trash TV’” (Genthin Süd Resident, 2011).

Generally, all of the interviewed actors, who are not living in Genthin Süd, have a negative and distanced perception of it. Even though they have no practical and daily experiences of living in this neighbourhood, they stigmatise it as ghetto and deprived area. A social worker in the Genthin Süd’s public school outlines that:

“these terms generally have nothing to do with the reality here in the neighbourhood, which is in the end not that bad. They are used by people who have no relation to the district, and they use it to degrade the district and its residents” (Social Worker, 2011).

## **5. Definitions and Dimensions of Ethnic Segregation in Small Towns**

By definition, there is a “disproportional allocation of ethnic groups resulting in the concentration of migrants” in the small town of Genthin [Friedrichs 1995, 79]. In comparison to the city as a whole, the neighbourhood of Genthin Süd represents a concentration of late repatriates. Thus, the qualitative definition of segregation can also be addressed towards small towns. Genthin Süd’s isolated location, the building structure and its insecure future enforce the segregation process and the negative reputation by the small town society. Due to the district’s demographic characteristics (migrants, elderly residents, deprived residents), there is an intense attention and scrutiny by external residents. Further, the ethnic segregation goes hand in hand with a social segregation that causes a collapse of social networks [BMVBS 2010]. This negative development of Genthin Süd results in the disadvantage of the neighbourhood and, finally, of the deprived population (“neighbourhood effects”). The district and composition of the neighbourhood limit the integration of the migrants [Alisch 2002].

Thus, the investigation not only provides data on the development of the ethnic segregation of the late repatriates in small towns, but, in regards to this immigrant group, it also clarifies that national settlement and allocation policies, implemented to prevent the socio-spatial concentration of repatriates, are reduced to absurdity. In

fact, the allocation and regulation of the residence assignment act produced a large-scale distribution and destruction of migrant networks and family units, but more importantly, these policies are the breeding ground for the forced and politically induced concentration and disintegration of late repatriates in deprived neighbourhoods on the local level.

Furthermore, the study illustrates similarities to segregated neighbourhoods on the edge of big cities: the spatial isolation, bad connections, decentral location, relatively bad living conditions and infrastructural deficits [BMVBS 2010b; Häußermann and Siebel, 2004; Häußermann and Siebel 2007; Kapphan 2008]. However, late repatriates are the only migration group in Genthin with specific settlement patterns, and there is only one place where this concentration has occurred. Moreover, the segregation process in Genthin Süd is particularly shaped and caused by local policies and the role of the reception centre. Urban and local factors, as Light [2006] also discovers, play a powerful and decisive role in shaping immigration flows. Urban policy can, in fact, make immigration policy. National and federal policies have resulted in small towns developing into new and forced migrant destinations. Moreover, they encouraged the emergence of “deflective local integration policies” aiming to strategically isolate and concentrate migrants in one specific neighbourhood by neglecting the access to other city areas and by means of distribution, discrimination and racism. The case study of Genthin represents how local concentration policies are linked to discriminative practices of city officials who have impact on the development of a segregated area. Albeit, Genthin Süd is no ethnic settlement or ethnic colony; it is only ethnically shaped. Specific migrant-orientated infrastructures are not present. The number of repatriates is simply too small and the dimension of segregation too minor. Furthermore, there is no concentration of crimes like there is in metropolises, as Krings-Heckemeier and Pfeiffer [1998, 104] argue when referring to segregation in big cities. Nonetheless, Genthin Süd is described as a ghetto and socially troubled area. This is predominantly a consequence of the small town’s society observation of the concentration of migrants due to a higher level of social control and scrutiny over cultural differences and their clash with the locals’ culture. This induces fear and resentment and hinders the integration process of late repatriates.

In regards to research on ethnic segregation in small towns, the study finally highlights the following major findings. The socio-spatial concentration of immigrants shows different dimensions and shaping compared to big cities. Because of the size of the small town, the social and spatial conditions and the (lower) share of immigrants, segregation takes place in other respects: even though the case study proves exclusion tendencies, there is no socio-spatial retreat of migrants. Because of social proximities, inevitable social contacts and assessable public, social and cultural infra-

structures, immigrants and locals are forced to confront one another. Qualitatively, segregation as a phenomenon and a process thus expresses itself in a different context and by different levels and measures. The small town society, especially in periphery regions, is designed differently compared to big cities, despite ongoing socialisation and urbanisation processes. On the one hand, there is the possibility that integration is more successful due to the small town's manageable infrastructures, social contacts and small shares of migrants. On the other hand, immigrants and their 'ethnic otherness' are more strongly noticed and less anonymous, and, thus, the small town society can likely exclude them from their existing and established culture and "social contracts." In Genthin, processes of stigmatisation modify the actual social and ethnic segregation. The neighbourhood and its residents are problematized. Due to Genthin's distinct social control, close social relations, specific value orientations and one-dimensional understanding of integration (which is assimilation), the segregation processes are mainly reinforced and discernible due to stigmatisation and the negative reputation of the district and its inhabitants. Consequently, it is plainly described as a "Russian Ghetto" or "Socially Troubled Area," even though there is only weak evidence for these extreme attributions. As a result, segregation in small towns predominantly expresses and manifests itself by the stigmatisation of the neighbourhood and its population. Thence, studying segregation processes in small towns also means investigating the reputation and development of stigmas. This appears to be even more important in regards to the forced localisation of immigrants as in Genthin. Neither the city and the local society nor the late repatriates decided on Genthin being a place of immigration and a destination of immigrants: it was national allocation and residence regulations that produced this outcome.

Friedrich [2009, 21] argues that the social and spatial differentiation and segregation significantly depend on the size and total population of a city. He argues that the bigger the city, the more likely the development of segregated areas. Nevertheless, quantitative approaches strongly characterise classical segregation research. This paper claims that statistical data and quantitative measures are insufficient to explain and investigate the formation of the socio-spatial concentration and stigmatisation. Firstly, the development of segregation indices is likely impossible for small towns because there is generally a lack of data on the level of small settlements and for specific migrant groups. In regards to late repatriates, there is neither much quantitative nor qualitative data on the integration and segregation process, especially because this group of people is statistically not counted due to their German ethnicity [BAMF 2007]. Secondly, the establishment of quantitative data is only able to partly illustrate the complex networks and structures of relationships, causes, influencing factors and the perception of the small town society on the segregation process. Therefore, there

is the need to study the issue on the levels of city actors, residents and migrants to collect data on personal, individual and societal experiences with migration, integration and segregation. Accordingly, this paper finally suggests focussing on social hierarchies and orders, social interrelations, interactions, understandings of integration and the attitudes of different actors in the city using qualitative and small-scale approaches to tackle and structure the process of segregation in small towns in its complexity.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This is the list of mentioned interviewees, approached in Genthin in 2011: City Historian of Genthin; Genthin Süd Resident; Late Repatriate; Library Director; Major of Genthin; Social Consultant; Social Worker; SWG, Städtische Wohnungsgesellschaft Genthin mbH [Municipal Housing Society].

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## Ghettos in Small Towns?

### The Research on Ethnic Segregation and Stigmatisation Processes in Small Town Germany

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**Abstract:** Not noticed by politics and research, immigration has increased in rural areas in Germany in the past decades, which puts forward questions of the integration of immigrants in small towns. This study reviews the current state of urban research on the given subject and puts the urban phenomenon of segregation in the context of small towns using case studies in Germany. The analysis employs a qualitative research approach to investigate the reality of ethnic segregation in small towns by illustrating the local conditions and tendencies of segregation, its causes, characteristics, and its perception by different groups within the town's society. The investigation of these topics is intended to provide a clear understanding of the primary argument of this research, namely that there is strong evidence for ethnic segregation in small towns, but the process seems to express itself in a different dimension in comparison to big cities. The appearance and on-going development of segregation are not only determined by macro-social factors and trends, but rather substantially affected by local practices, political decisions and also by the perceptions and views of the small town society. This intense scrutiny of segregated areas produces a stigmatization of neighbourhoods and their residents, xenophobic attitudes and neighbourhood conflicts, which highly influence the quality of segregation and the integration process of immigrants. Finally, this paper proposes the necessity of setting different patterns for the research of the subject in small towns in order to understand the complexity of segregation development in small towns, which is highly affected by particular processes of stigmatization.

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*Keywords: Ethnic Segregation; Small Towns; Rural Germany; Stigmatisation; Immigrant Integration; Community Studies.*

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