

## MIGRATION ACTIVITY FROM CROATIA TO GERMANY AND RETURN TENDENCIES — AN ACCOUNT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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Germany was one of the preferred destinations of Croatian migrants already long before systematic labor migration took off in the late 1960ies, after the signing of a bilateral agreement between the German and the former Yugoslav government. In the aftermath of World War Two political émigrés, representatives of the bourgeoisie, and migrants searching for economic survival and / or for freedom of religious practice had likewise been seeking refuge in Germany. Again in the 1990ies Germany lead the list of countries in Europe who admitted refugees from war-torn areas of the Former Yugoslavia. Looking back to those times, migration activities between Croatia and Germany have nowadays slowed down. However, circular and temporary migrations and transnational activities in general are considerable, thus reflecting mobility patterns common within Europe today. As specific form of migration remigrations, co-ethnic or homeland migrations<sup>1</sup> are part of such recent developments. Croatia — historically rather a site of sending than receiving migrants — has in two decades of post-socialist transition only to a small extent attracted migrants with different, non-Croatian national or ethnic backgrounds. What it has seen in terms of immigration was by and large co-ethnic, homeland and return migration. So far, there is hardly any quantitative knowledge and even hardly estimates about how many return migrants have actually stayed, or have left again back to their original countries of residence (estimates about the number of immigrants / return migrants who came to Croatia in the first part of the 1990ies for example range between 5000 and 55000 people).

It is noteworthy that with this post-independence co-ethnic homeland migration were returning well educated representatives of the middle classes from the Croatian Diaspora of not only the first, but equally the second migrant generation, meaning children of former emigrants going “back home” on behalf of their parents, who often continued to live in the current country of residence.

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<sup>1</sup> For the discussion of terminology see Čapo Žmegač 2010, 227.

As any form of migration — be it forced or deliberate, politically motivated or for reasons of labor search — also remigrations reflect actual economic, political and social conditions and prospects both in the sending as well as receiving societies. So-called push and pull factors are usually combined of such various conditions, which in complex configurations with life cycle and family network considerations motivate individual decision making and action. As circular, transnational and (temporary) remigration activities have increasingly become a common mobility pattern particularly within the European Union they also — and specifically with respect to (highly) skilled labor migration — have become a matter of interest and key concern to policy makers. Transfers of knowledge, culture and experience, which go along with migration activities, bear potential for innovation and development, and for international (bi- and multilateral) cooperation. They also present integration challenges and enrich integration experiences in increasingly pluralizing societies like Croatia. Such experiences shall be explored here with respect to the German-Croatian migration context. With Croatia's accession to the European Union in 2013, migrant experiences and knowledge draws into focus that migrants as well as remigrants can even be considered potential mediators between countries and societies. A closer look shall therefore be taken into current patterns and features of migration from Croatia to Germany, as well as into return migration tendencies and experiences.

### Current features of migration from Croatia to Germany

German statistical data in 2009 accounted for more than 16 Million people as belonging to the so-called population with migration background. This means that approximately 8.8% of the German population today are foreigners, and 10.4% are German citizens with migration background.<sup>2</sup> According to these official numbers of the Federal Bureau for Statistics Croats currently make 3,3% of all foreigners resident in Germany. It needs however to be noted that German statistics take record of citizens / citizenship, not of nationality / ethnicity. Statistical information include Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina or other parts of the Former Yugoslavia only, if they have registered as citizens of the Republic of Croatia, in case they hold double citizenship. Other sources can be found, which include Croatians from different parts of the Former Yugoslavia. Such estimates correct official German statistics, claiming the number of Croatian residents in Germany to be one third higher.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> [www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/Thematisch/Bevoelkerung/MigrationIntegration/AuslaendBevoelkerung2010200097004.pdf?blob=publicationFile](http://www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/Thematisch/Bevoelkerung/MigrationIntegration/AuslaendBevoelkerung2010200097004.pdf?blob=publicationFile)

<sup>3</sup> [www.hercegbosna.org/kolumne/demografija/hrvati-u-njemackoj-1710.htm](http://www.hercegbosna.org/kolumne/demografija/hrvati-u-njemackoj-1710.htm)

With 221.222 of a total of 6.694.766 foreigners registered by the Federal Ministry of Migration and Refugees the Croatian is amongst the five biggest foreign populations in Germany — besides the Turkish, Italian, Polish and Greek populations. Approximately 22.2 % of all Croats registered in Germany are born in the country (49.011 persons), which means they belong to the second migrant generation; 77.8% (172.211 persons) Croats living in Germany are foreign born.<sup>4</sup> The average length of residence of foreigners living in Germany was 18,6 years in 2009 — this was valid for 91.1% of all Croats. The average length of residence of a Croat living in Germany was 27.7 years, the age group longest residing were thirty years and older, followed by the fifteen to twenty year olds. Accounting also for these long residence periods amongst foreigners in Germany, the Croatian population is perceived of as particularly well integrated.

Migration research today perceives of migration in terms of a transnational dynamics embedded in an individual life cycle and entangled in family networks and other social configurations following cyclic timelines rather than of a linear process of initial emigration from a home society and subsequent adaptation, assimilation and integration in a host society (Bauböck and Faist 2010). This holds true also with respect to Croatian migration behaviour and activity. To commute between two countries, to be engaged in living in two societies and to operate within two worlds is today a common feature of migration. Thus migrants as well as those who stay behind are being entangled in those transnational networks and dynamics of migration spun over time. Such patterns and practices can be equally observed with respect to the migration activities of Croats between Croatia and Germany today. Statistical information of the visa department at the German Embassy in Zagreb for the year 2010 also corresponds with those general patterns discussed in migration literature. In the first quarter of the year a total of 3.870 residence permits were being issued, of which 1.678 were short term (mostly for professional purposes), 2.190 were medium term (mostly again for professional purposes, but also for reasons of family reunion, education / scholarship / research, apprenticeship, and au-pair). In the second quarter of 2010 a total of 3.092 residence permits were issued, 1.326 short term, and 1.765 medium term (for analogous reasons).

In autumn 2010 forty five applicants for temporary residency permits in Zagreb were responding to questions about migration intentions and activities, which they were asked in semi-structured interviews for a small research project on current migration patterns and behaviour of Croats to Germany.<sup>5</sup> In addition,

<sup>4</sup> [www.bamf.de/DE/Infothek/Statistiken/Auslaenderzahlen/auslaenderzahlen-node.html](http://www.bamf.de/DE/Infothek/Statistiken/Auslaenderzahlen/auslaenderzahlen-node.html)

<sup>5</sup> The project was funded by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung; results are published in Reifeld 2011.

I conducted expert interviews and interviews with return migrants from Germany to elucidate actual practices, of which statistical information can give only tangential impressions. The interview responses conveyed that individual mobility always affects also more stationary relatives, spouses, children, siblings, as well as friends or other partners relevant to an individual migrant. Most interview partners expressed their intention to go to Germany for seasonal work or on temporary work contracts, with or without spouses, a practice many of them had been involved in already repeatedly over years. Only few respondents expressed their wish to leaving to Germany for good. A pattern rather of leaving and returning, of commuting even between both home and host country instead of staying in one of them permanently was visible in many cases. A small minority only referred to family reunion or marriage as primary migration motive. Correspondingly, it was only them who intended to leave Croatia for good. The average age of respondents was between 35 and 40 years, however around 50% were under thirty years of age, and around 50% over 50 years of age. As is generally been observed and was confirmed also in the interviews personal migration motives are mostly corresponding with structural conditions and incentives, are informed through socio-economic as well as political considerations, weighing developments both in home and host society, previous and current country of residency. The slow and gradual decrease of prosperity gaps between Croatia and Germany contributes nowadays to a reducing of migration incentives particularly with respect to seasonal and labor migration. Since post-socialist transition political pressures in the home society and in turn freedoms in the host society have further lost relevance as push and pull factors.

Temporary migrations today are equally to those in previous decades organized in a cost-saving manner, spouses and children are usually left at home, or, if both spouses should migrate, children under age eighteen are being left behind with relatives. It is often within networks of friends or colleagues that temporary migration is being realized and a job been found. Usually, a concrete job offer, an educational arrangement with an institution of higher learning, or even a contract with a prospective employer exists. The more qualified a job, the more are gaining experiences, additional training, skills and techniques motivating incentives to move abroad for some time. A regular and secure salary, a positive workplace climate, fairness amongst colleagues and of employers, a safe work environment with adequate health protection, regular working hours and free time arrangements are frequently mentioned as further expectations. Effective representation of workers' interests is also one of the repeatedly expressed hopes which contribute to contrasting favorable working conditions between Germany and Croatia. Previous work experiences in Germany, reports of

friends, colleagues and relatives contribute to the general image. Relatively little attention is being paid to issues such as accommodation, neighborhood, or how to spend leisure time if a temporary stay is planned. Such considerations come afore if temporarily unlimited migration is intended. They are then accompanied by expectations concerning the enhancement of language skills, by wishes with respect to social contacts — either to Germans or to other migrants (mostly of Croatian or Central / South Eastern European origin) — by plans to engage into sports, church or activities organized within Diaspora networks. In case of family reunion or marriage as migration motive such considerations are an implicit part of decision making when a choice for a country of residence is being made between (future) spouses, but emotional aspects, hopes and expectations are priority.

As in previous time electronic media and constant contacts between relatives at home and in Diaspora encourage the development of migration intentions and thus centrally contribute to decision making. Images of Germany are usually sketched in contrast to images of Croatia; depictions of both societies are being reciprocally and interdependently shaped. Germany mostly is being described positively as an orderly country with a stable political, legal and economic system; the population is characterized as friendly but cold. In comparison, Croatia appears as a country with more favorable climate, natural resources and economic potential (tourism, energy) yet to be discovered, the Croatian population likewise as friendly and warm. However, the image of current political and economic conditions is oblique if not dark, the political elite is being characterized as dubious. A critical stance towards the home society legitimates migration and facilitates the move. Returning migrants similarly described in the interviews, how the country of origin appears in brighter light the closer return comes, whereas the country of residence and host society is being looked at with more critical distance. In general, the interviews disclosed that in contrast to the present Croatias' future appears in positive light, in particular impacted by the accession to the European Union in 2013.

### Recent return migration tendencies from Germany to Croatia

Since independence and throughout the different phases of post-socialist transition Croatia has received hardly quantifiable numbers of return migrants / remigrants / homeland migrants from the Diaspora, and also from Germany. Besides the returning "Gastarbeiter" or the repatriated refugee, return and homeland migrants were frequently representatives of the (often highly) educated middle classes, early or mid-career professionals, who decided to "go back" to

Croatia, often members already of the second generation, meaning children of former migrants, who realized what is being referred to in the scientific debate as “roots migration” or “ancestral return”. Reliable statistical data about migration practices of skilled migrants are generally, and also with respect to Croatia, difficult to gain. But also reports and experiential accounts of remigration / homeland migration to Croatia are largely missing. What it means to migrate to, integrate and establish oneself in a society in transition, what opportunities as well as obstacles paved the migration path is best being illuminated from the point of view of those who actually made use of and were faced with them.

Experiences described in narrative interviews which I have been conducting since autumn 2010 reveal that (return and) homeland migration — like any other kind of migration — is an extremely heterogenous phenomenon influenced by gender, age group, socio-economic or status group and generational belonging, as well as by a variety of socio-cultural factors which determine a way of life and status in a host and / or in a home environment. Nevertheless, there are recognizable similarities of homeland migration and return experiences, which can be identified within as well as across gender, generational and socio-economic status groups with respect to motivations, responses to chance structures, life planning, identity management, and integration.

Why engaging and investing in homeland migration? The political changes and economic transformation coming along with Croatias' independence can be considered generally key incentives for homeland migration in the past two decades. However, expectations were necessarily different of a young adult, with a professional career and family planning lying ahead, from those of a mid-career return migrant or pensioner. While members of the first migrant generation de facto returned, members of the second and even third generation rather migrated to a country they had never resided in before. It was for them to realize a return on behalf of their parents or grandparents, which is often referred to as “myth” held dear amongst emigrants in diasporas. Some were followed by parents. Members of the second generation took the step of homeland migration mostly as young adults, imagining themselves sometimes rather romantically as fellow country-women and -men “returning home” to help develop the young democratic state and society. It is to be assumed that such “returns” were frequently reversed again, or led to modes of living in / between two places. What seems to have been shared across generations is the motive of taking chances (something which had initially lead to emigration), of contributing to, and profiting from a situation as amorph as post-socialist transition and system change is. Curiosity and openness for something new and unknown is mentioned across generational, gender and status group lines, as well as a gen-

erally optimistic image of the Croatian society expressed (emphasizing change, possibilities, opportunities). The war meant for some postponement, for others even a further argument for realising the idea of homeland return.

When is return or homeland migration been realized? Homeland migration in the early 1990ies responded quite openly and generally to political liberalisation, the introduction of a market economy and the beginnings of privatisation. In later transitional periods, return migrants had usually planned much more strategically and in more detail their professional integration into an already more consolidated work environment. The migration moment in both phases however was usually intertwined with individual life cycle considerations and respective calculations. It coincided with times of passage from one cycle to the next (i.e. after finishing school, at the beginning or end of studies, at the beginning of working age, just before or just after being married or divorced, in a stage of establishing a new level of professional independence), or also with times of biographical crisis. Family members and networks had usually to be taken into account and coordination between life cycles of several individuals was required. Some reported difficulties which had supported and triggered the realization of pending migration decisions: limited possibilities of professional self-realisation, status blockages etc.

How have migration experiences been inscribed into identities? As a sense of self, of individual coherence, and of belonging identity is submitted to continuous processes of development within changing frames of references. Migration experiences shift the individual back and forth between different frames of references, socio-cultural environments, and exposes what is usually been taken for granted and therefore not questioned to frictions, irritations and breaks. Where we belong, what we identify with, how we are being seen and see ourselves keep being in flux all throughout life and depend on interactions with significant Others (family, friends, teachers etc.; see Strauss 1968). The ways we individually deal with, respond to and integrate those dynamics could be called "identity management". An integral part of migration activities between Croatia and Germany — different to overseas migration — have been regular homeland visits. Cultural and language practicing in the Diaspora, as well as institutional integration i.e. via the church were paramount for the construction and preservation of a sense of belonging and of a Croatian identity. The importance of a Croatian identity could be more or less central in different stages of life; for some it was raising during adolescence: in a phase of life, where recognition and respect through others and one's social environment (teachers, classmates, peers outside of school, friends, family) gain crucial relevance; in a period, where differences and disrespect also is being strongly perceived. How do oth-

ers see me? Who am I? Where do I belong? Am I like the others, am I different, am I equal? To try one's luck in the "other world over there", so it was mentioned repeatedly, then turned from being an option to becoming a plan. Others chose as identity management on the contrary to turn their back on everything "Croatian", what could represent their difference to the cultural environment in which every-day-life was taking place. To be living in / between two worlds, to be closely related to significant Others in two socio-cultural environments has been experienced a normality — however differently — by members both of the first and second generation. For members of the second generation who were raised and socialized in Germany, Croatia though was mainly a destination for vacation. Longing for friends or routines back home in Germany were part of those vacation visits, as were language barriers, as well as feelings of being different. All this could compromise a sense of belonging, and implant an intrinsic ambiguity into the category "homeland". Homeland therefore may have become something one wanted to learn more about.

How have homeland integration experiences affected a sense of belonging? (Multi-) local as well as transnational attachments, which are likewise been shaped through inclusion as well as exclusion, have been referred to both as a resource and a dilemma. In some interviews they were commented as a loss of roots and home, in others as beneficial training of flexibility, of voluntary detachment and attachment eventually helpful in integration processes. Identity management between those parameters has sometimes lead to strategies of bypassing insider/outsider-configurations which were useful for newcomers or returning migrants integrating into and finding their place in "old" structures. Return migrants of the first generation described homeland migration and integration frequently as attempts to re-settle into a life left behind. Only few of them though were cheerful about a successful re-integration. Much more often they pointed out, that life back home had changed, or that people had changed — or that they themselves had undergone changes which made it difficult to re-adapt. Those who engaged in professional life pointed out advantages and even relief of being self-employed or, on the other hand profound frictions they had suffered with established structures, personnel, and mind-sets.

Second generation homeland migrants related integration difficulties more to individual shortcomings, such as limited cultural and language competence. Integration into language games (i.e. understanding of jokes, attitudes, behaviors) were being described as central part of acculturation processes. Discontent and frictions with conditions in the educational system as well as with routines and hierarchies at work were equally topical. How to constructively embrace critique and to express criticism was being cherished repeatedly as integral part



of education in the German system, which proved to be rather dysfunctional or completely missing in the Croatian context. Amongst others it is in such moments that awareness of socio-cultural difference through inter-cultural comparison emerges. To use such experience as resource rather than as handicap, to turn comparison into a visionary skill of detecting potential for change and development yet is waiting to be uncovered. That migrants could be intercultural mediators and agents of change seems more often claimed than actually realized.

Integration processes in work routines and into institutional structures can last but not least be read also as struggles for status and recognition, especially when status limitations or blockages were meant to be overcome through migration. Cultural stereotyping of newcomers, shaming and social contempt, which made part of integration experiences for example of Croatians or Croatian-Germans returning from Germany were interpreted by some as useful means applied to keep competition at bay, or as instrument to discourage the career aspirations of someone who came from "outside".

## Conclusion / Outlook

Appeals to the Diaspora to engage in economic, political and social developments "at home" not only via foreign direct investment and remittances, but even more through investment of soft development factors and human capital are cyclically been issued. Taking into account, that the Croatian society follows European wide demographic trends of ageing with continuously declining birth rates (see Project Europe 2030 / Reflection Group Report), alarmed reactions to equally continuing braindrain of young people are not surprising. Diaspora outreach and return programs (for scientists i.e. "Unity through Knowledge") attempt to counter / reverse such trends. The global competition for young (highly) skilled labor also is being reflected in the popularity of such programs. However, how sustainable such programs are has hardly been asked, let alone been discussed between sending and receiving societies. To use the Croatian Diaspora in Germany for example as potential resource for economic, scientific and cultural development and cooperation has not been systematically addressed or integrated into strategic planning. The observations previously presented allow concluding that with raising living standards in Croatia general labor migration might further decline. On the other hand, migration of highly skilled migrants (with tertiary education) and of professionals will continue or even increase, given the (uncompetitive) level of educational and employment opportunities in Croatia. Circular migration activities, which ideally follow actual supply and demand dynamics particularly with respect to skilled migration for educational

and professional purposes might increasingly become the predominant migration pattern. This optimistic picture however needs to face a central challenge: if short-term migration of skilled migrants becomes permanent, if return paths remain uneven, brain drain will continue contributing to further demographic decline and the shrinking of the professional labor force in Croatia. In order to evaluate and to further develop adequate Diaspora-outreach-programs in particular, and immigration legislation harmonized with EU standards and regulations in general, the actors' perspective gives indispensable insights. It furthermore induces a shift of focus on actual structural incentives or obstacles along the way of homeland migration. Strategic exchange between two countries such as Croatia and Germany could only benefit from such accounts in order to enhance knowledge and understanding concerning the role of migrants with respect to a demand driven development cooperation between two countries.

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