

# Recent Irish and British Migration to Berlin – A Case of Lifestyle Migration?

Melanie Neumann

IRISH-GERMAN STUDIES  
DEUTSCH-IRISCHE STUDIEN  
LÉANN NA GEARMÁINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN

12

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 Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

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Irish-German Studies / Deutsch-irische Studien, vol. 12

University of Limerick, Centre for Irish-German Studies, Limerick

Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2020

ISSN 1393-8061

ISBN 978-3-86821-868-8

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ISBN 978-3-86821-868-8

Cover image: Chris Kealy

Cover design: Brigitta Disseldorf

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WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Postfach 4005, 54230 Trier

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to this publication and supported me along the way, either morally, financially or through stimulating discussions and exchanges.

Special thanks goes to Prof Dr Gesa Stedman and Dr Gisela Holfter for their constructive feedback, constant support and, most importantly, for believing in me.

My sincere thanks also goes to Prof Dr Magdalena Nowicka, Dr Dawn Mannay, Dr Hugh Mackay, Dr Michaela Benson, PD Dr Fergal Lenehan, Dr Carmel Finnan, Niels Michalski and everyone else who helped me find my way in the beginning, and who were always ready to give feedback and inspire throughout.

Similarly, my profound gratitude goes to all the staff at the Centre for British Studies for inspiring coffee chats and fun lunches, and to my fellow PhD students (our success team meetings kept me sane), as well as the Centre for Irish-German Studies for hosting me and making me feel welcome during my research stay at the University of Limerick.

A special mention goes to the Irish and British communities in Berlin for taking part in my survey as well as the interviews and thus sharing your stories with me. All of this would not have been possible without you and your trust.

Last, but by no means least, a huge thank you to my family, especially my parents Maik and Sylke, and my grandparents Helga, Martina, Roland and Werner, for moral, financial and emotional support, as well as to all my friends who were there for me through the sweat and tears, but also – naturally – for the celebrations of the small, and sometimes not so small, successes along the way. Eva Kilian and Sandra Meissner deserve special mention here. Finally, Chris Kealy, for the inspiring cover photo, his assiduous proof-reading and immeasurable support, especially throughout the final weeks of this project and beyond, and for being there for me no matter what, for being understanding, for putting a smile on my face and for so much more:

Ich danke dir von ganzem Herzen. Du bist der Beste!

Nobody gives a shit about you in Berlin. Infamy or fame, it doesn't  
mean much there.

(David Bowie 1978)

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## Abbreviations

AfD	Alternative für Deutschland
ATA	Applied Thematic Analysis
CSO	Central Statistics Office
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ESS	European Social Survey
EU	European Union
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
gt	grounded theory
MPI	Migration Policy Institute
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
ONS	Office for National Statistics
SOEP	Sozio-oekonomisches Panel
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

## 1. Starting Points: Irish and British Migration to Berlin – A Case of Lifestyle Migration?

In the early stages of my research, and especially through newspaper articles on the British and Irish communities in the German capital (cf. e.g. Kamradt 2015; Scally 2016), I came to the realisation that a large proportion of the British and Irish in Berlin could not simply be classified as labour migrants and thus needed to be studied from another angle. However, while research into so-called “privileged” migration has proliferated during the past couple of years (cf. e.g. Walsh 2006; Olwig 2007; Gatti 2009; Cranston 2017), it mainly focuses on expatriates, i.e. people sent abroad by their companies or those leaving their home country specifically to work for a company or government agency abroad (cf. Sriskandarajah & Drew 2006: 43). Yet, as Scott (2006: 1107) remarks “cities are not just home to polarised communities of international immigrants: the elite and the underclass (Sassen 1991)”, but “attract a broader stream of migrants who are unspectacularly part of a ‘normal’ mass middle class (Hamnett 1994)” and do not fall into either of the extremes of poor versus rich and thus the categories of (forced) labour and elite migration or expatriates. The concept of lifestyle migration, though, developed inductively by Karen O’Reilly and Michaela Benson (cf. Benson & O’Reilly 2009a; Benson 2011; Benson & Osbaldiston 2014) and frequently used to study recent British emigration, offered a solution, aiming to look more at the “middle-ground” (Scott 2006: 1107) and the complex nature of migration outside of categorisation. Lifestyle migration is “the spatial mobility of relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that are meaningful because, for various reasons, they offer the potential of a better quality of life” (cf. Benson & O’Reilly 2009a: 2). Lifestyle migrants do not prioritise economic reasons, even though these might play a role in their decision to move; rather they migrate because they think that the new destination will give their life more meaning, will enable them to realise their dreams and break away from constraints they are experiencing in their home country (cf. Benson & O’Reilly 2009a: 1-5). This is especially interesting considering Berlin’s reputation as cheap, cool, creative and a city where everything is possible (cf. Kamradt 2015). In fact, Griffiths and Maile (2014: 140), as well as Verwiebe (2011: 14-15), claim that a considerable part of intra-European middle-class movement to Berlin could be classified as lifestyle migration, but that the city as a destination for lifestyle migrants is still not sufficiently researched. In the following chapters, I will argue and demonstrate that a significant number of British and Irish migrants to Berlin have not come to the city out of economic necessity, but rather to break free from the constraints of their respective home societies and to realise their potential. This differentiates them from labour migrants, who have been the focus of most of the studies on migration to Berlin (e.g. Pfeffer-Hoffmann 2014, 2017; Maaß & Icks 2012), and justifies an investigation into the British and Irish migrant com-

munities in the city. The lifestyle migration paradigm enables the researcher to recognise both the city's economic as well as cultural assets, and thus offers the perfect tool to investigate "the middle-ground", those native English-speaking migrants in the creative start-up city that is Berlin, who are neither the elite nor the "under-class". As urban lifestyle migration is a relatively understudied phenomenon<sup>1</sup>, the current study will make a significant contribution to migration research by opening lifestyle migration research to a broader group of migrants and thus reflect the diversity of migratory movements and the meaning of the migration decision for the migrants themselves, as well as the host community.

## 1.1 Positioning within Migration Research

Migration, with an emphasis on labour and forced migration, has been an issue of interest for researchers, politicians and the media in the past couple of decades. However, recently the issue has become more pressing with close-to-daily coverage of labour migrants and refugees to wealthier countries, especially in Western Europe (cf. e.g. Denkler 2015; Gaugele 2015; Kingsley 2016; Leubecher 2018; Hill 2018). Recent statistics and reports have shown that Germany especially, due to its continuing economic growth and skills shortage, is becoming a popular destination for migrants from all over the world, but in particular those from other EU countries (cf. Ohlinger 2014; Pfeffer-Hoffmann 2017). In 2012 Germany was, for the first time, second of all OECD-countries in terms of immigration figures (cf. Alscher 2014). Compared to 2011, permanent immigration to Germany rose by 38%, to 399.900. The figures for the same year for traditional immigration havens like Canada and Australia were 257.900 and 245.100 respectively (cf. Alscher 2014).

As Berlin is the location for this research, I will focus on selected migration figures for the city. Immigration from Turkey, which had been very strong historically due to the 1961 Anwerbeabkommen<sup>2</sup>, has been plummeting until recently, while immigration from those EU countries that were hit by the economic crisis of the late-2000s, such as Spain, and Eastern European countries, has been increasing since the turn of the century, though it has slowed considerably from 2013 onwards (cf. Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg 2018e). Net migration from the UK and Ireland to Berlin, however, has steadily increased, except for the period between 2013-2015<sup>3</sup>, as can be seen in graph 1 below. Between 2006 and 2016, the time

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1 For an extensive literature review on lifestyle migration see chapter 2.4.

2 Recruitment agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Turkey.

3 The dip in 2009 can be explained by the introduction of standardised tax ident numbers in Berlin, during which everyone who did not live at their registered address anymore got removed from the register (cf. Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg 2010).