The Black Box of Displacement
Do People Remain in their Neighborhoods or Relocate to the Periphery?

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Ever since gentrification has been debated in Berlin, it has been accompanied by heated exchanges over where the displaced residents move. There are essentially two positions. The first is exemplified by the assessment offered by a senior government official in 1991. In a Spiegel interview, this official predicted that Berlin would experience "a new period of economic expansion, both striking and brutal"—a period in which the prefabricated concrete-slab housing developments on the northern and eastern peripheries of the city would serve as "vacuum cleaners" sucking residents from the city center (Spiegel 1991, p. 112–114). The thesis that poor households would migrate to peripheral areas has persisted ever since and continues to be cited as a menacing scenario in the current debate—often with reference to the French banlieues. The second position, which stands in sharp contrast to this, has been defended by scholars such as Häußermann and Kapphan (2002) and Häußermann et al. (2002) in the debate on gentrification in Prenzlauer Berg. According to this thesis, due to the markedly different quality of housing in most of the central areas of Berlin, lower-income households are more likely to be displaced to poorer-quality apartments (e.g., in rear buildings, on ground floors, and in new buildings constructed on vacant lots) than to areas farther away. Instead of a displacement to the outskirts of the city, there is a "lifestyle displacement" (Häußermann et al. 2002).

So far, both positions have been insufficiently supported by data, for which there are various reasons. First, the study of migration processes within cities is generally a difficult undertaking in German urban research. This is presumably due to the high level of abstraction and the multivariability of the individual relocations. In addition, migration research faces the problem that spatial links can be established only indirectly and selectively and the theoretical foundations explaining migration processes can be applied only to migration between cities (Friedrichs and Nonnenmacher 2007). Thus, in analyses of migration, we cannot automatically draw conclusions about individual motives. Second, the majority of essays about gentrification processes focus on one specific neighborhood and
on classifying the new arrivals (for a critical discussion, see Bernt et al. 2010). These essays only examine the changes in the neighborhoods suspected of being gentrified and thus direct attention to the groups entering the areas. Both types of studies are undertaken with the help of a grid defining the different groups of actors. They often ignore the question of where the displaced residents move, although this question is crucial for a critical perspective on gentrification processes. Additionally, the studies often have a short temporal perspective. Interval-based studies such as those carried out by Karin Wiest and André Hill in Leipzig (Wiest and Hill 2004) are more the exception than the rule. In this context, we only rarely see a research approach that links developments in parts of the city with those in the entire city and looks at migration movements in the entire city from the perspective of a single neighborhood over a longer period of time.

This is the starting point of our research, which examines out-migration from the district of Prenzlauer Berg between 1994 and 2010. Its goal is to gain insight into the direction of displacement processes. In order to answer this question, we drew on the data on relocations from the local population register (Einwohnermelderegister), which were analyzed with respect to destinations, migration volumes and share of total migration. What emerged were the most important migration flows and their dynamics. Because we used aggregate data that contained all the possible relocations from Prenzlauer Berg, it was not possible to generate clear findings about the displacement of low-income households.\footnote{Particularly because the quantitative measurement of displacement processes is generally a difficult task from a methodological and conceptual perspective (Atkinson 2000).} However, it is beyond dispute among researchers that modernization and the accompanying displacement processes must be seen as "mobility catalysts" (Holm 2006). In the course of modernization and renovation in Prenzlauer Berg, between 60 to 80 percent of residents moved out of the affected residential buildings (Häußermann et al. 2002; Holm 2006). Thus, a high intensity of modernization is probably reflected in the migration statistics. In addition, based on the direction of migration, it is possible to assess the capacity of the destination areas to absorb new arrivals. For financial reasons, poorer households, in particular, face limitations when selecting areas to live. This is why changes in the destinations of migration from Prenzlauer Berg must be examined in relation to the development of rents in the destination neighborhoods.

Prenzlauer Berg is best suited to this type of study because it was one of the first areas to be gentrified in Berlin, which means it can be investigated in a extended time series study. In addition, it can be linked to the heated scholarly debate on the consequences of gentrification.