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The Failure of Transnational Retirement Migration on the Example of German Retirees in Thailand

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Thailand has been one of the most common destinations for retirement migrants worldwide for centuries. Known for its supposedly healthy climatic conditions, high-quality care facilities, and the availability of attractive, primarily female lovers, many German migrants seek to improve their life quality in the Southeast Asian country. However, retiring in Thailand is not always successful, as several problems can arise. The purpose of this paper is to examine aspects associated with a failing migration of German retirees to the country and to explain their interrelations. Furthermore, the organization and procedures of the returns to Germany shall be analyzed. With the help of the internet, four suitable persons have been acquired and questioned in guided interviews. Overall, four aspects contributing to a failing migration can be distinguished: the financial circumstances of the retirees and their families; a lack of language skills; interpersonal and integration conflicts; failed relationships and marriages. The return to Germany then proceeds mostly unplanned and forced rather than well-prepared.

1. Introduction

Migration is as old as humanity. Since humans have existed, they have moved, voluntarily or involuntarily, from one place to another, so there are millions of migrants worldwide (Wehrhahn 2016: 52). Transnational migration is a specific form of migration that is characterized by the development of social connections between the migrant's country of origin and the destination country (Kaiser 2011: 52). Migration is a phenomenon that cannot exclusively be associated with younger people. "Although it is not common among the majority of older people, migration also occurs [...]" in the later years of life (Repetti & Calasanti 2024: 2). The so-called "retirement migration" is a temporary or long-term migration across national borders (Bender 2015: 78).

The Southeast Asian country Thailand is a common destination for retirement migrants from all over the world. This development resulted from the Thai government advertising tourism for vacationing or medical reasons (Sunanta & Jaisekun 2022: 210). As stated by Sasiwongsaroj & Husa (2022: 61ff.), there were 101.589 foreigners in 2021 obtaining retirement visas or visas for medical treatment, according to the Immigration Bureau. However, determining an exact number of retirement migrants is difficult as the term is referred to as ambiguous (ibid: 63). Due to the increasing number of retirees, many different types of "living facilities which specifically or inclusively cater to the demands of international retirement migrants", such as nursing homes, serviced residences, or condominiums, emerged (He & Sasiwongsaroj 2024:

179). They provide different levels of support and care (ibid: 179). Some of these institutions were explicitly built for German retirees (Bender et al. 2015: 132). The facilities in Thailand attract them by emphasizing advantages compared to German facilities, including lower costs of living, high-quality care services, and a sufficient number of trained staff. Additionally, the country offers a warm climate, a rich culture as well as a variety of leisure activities (ibid: 139).

Still, spending retirement in Thailand is not successful for all of the German migrants. Whereas the transnational retirement migration to the Southeast Asian country is a current topic of research, return migration has rarely been investigated so far. Thus, the paper aims to find aspects that contribute to their decision to leave Thailand in favor of their home country and examine the interrelations between them. Furthermore, the study outlines the organization and procedures of the retiree's returns.

2. Theoretical background

Transnationalism refers to "a social process in which migrants establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders" (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992: ix). Those social fields link their country of origin and their country of settlement (ibid: 1). Thus, transnational spaces transcending "one or more nation-states" emerge (Pries 2002: 267).

The transnational retirement migration differs from other forms of transnational migration because of its motives. The retiree's decision to change their domicile in favor of a destination outside of their home country is predominantly driven by a favorable environment as well as an improvement in life quality and living conditions (Kaiser 2011: 60).

Husa et al. (2014: 137) investigated the migration to Thailand's cities Hua Hin and Cha-am in a case study, focusing on migrants who wished to improve their life quality and living conditions. They found out that 42% of the participants were aged between 60 and 70. For many of them, spending retirement in Thailand was a long-desired dream that had emerged from the supposedly healthy climatic conditions and the lower costs of living (ibid: 161).

Additionally, the availability of attractive female lovers constitutes another important reason to migrate to Thailand, especially for retired men (Bender & Schweppe 2022: 118). In their article, Bender & Schweppe (2022: 117) analyzed the influence of love, sexuality, and intimacy on the retirement migration of German men to the Southeast Asian country. In the interviews they conducted they found out that the majority of the men had experienced a divorce or relationship ending in Germany before they decided to live abroad. The men stated that, because of their beneficial financial situation compared to the country's average income, they usually have a

high reputation in Thailand (ibid: 125). On the contrary, in the case of German-Thai marriages, Bender & Schweppe (2022: 131ff) point out that the financial differences can result in money transfers to Thai women and their families, which increase the vulnerability of the German retirees and can lead to problems within the marriage. Lafferty & Maher (2020: 1638f.), who conducted two studies with “*farangs*” in Thailand, come to the same conclusion. They also explain that many retirees fear financial loss and feel suspicious about the feelings of the Thai women. Some men even become financially dependent on the wife’s family, so a return to their home country is not possible (ibid: 1643).

According to Schweppe (2022: 204), many retirees move to Thailand because of difficult financial or social circumstances in Germany. Even though they hope for an improvement in those circumstances, some risk factors in the country can sustain existing problems or even cause new ones. Schweppe (2022: 204) especially refers to health- and care-related problems that occur because of the loss of German pension insurance.

Howard (2008: 145) conducted a study to examine the retirees’ problems after migrating to Thailand in more depth. The majority of the participants stated that they would like to spend the rest of their lives in the country. Nevertheless, nine retirement migrants decided to return to their home country. Their decision was driven by financial problems, wrong expectations towards their new domicile, or homesickness (ibid: 155). Furthermore, they mentioned lacking language skills, little knowledge about the Thai culture, and, as a result, almost no contact with locals. Additionally, applying for a visa to be a legal resident in the country is referred to as difficult (ibid: 156). Jöstl & Wieser (2011: 169) mentioned the strict rules for visa applicants too but also described the restrictions for foreign people to own real estate in the Southeast Asian country.

That retiring abroad cannot only lead to problems in Thailand, Betty & Hall (2015: 127) found out in their study. They also conducted interviews, but with British retirees who had moved to different regions in Spain. They were asked about their plans to return to the UK and the related problems. Furthermore, British retirees could share reasons for their wish to return in a web forum (ibid: 125). Betty & Hall (2015: 125ff) differentiated between three reasons that can contribute to a return to the UK. First of all, the retirees mentioned health-related issues. Secondly, it became apparent that many elderly people suffer from depression and feel lonely as a result of lacking social interactions. Lastly, the interviewees described financial insecurities and lack of language skills as aspects that lead to a return to their home country.

3. Socio-scientific aspects for the examination of migration in old age

3.1 Life quality in old age

Life quality is a subjective perception that is related to the culture a person is living in as well as to individual goals, expectations, and standards (Renneberg & Lippke 2006: 29). Life quality in old age is an important field of research because of an increasing life expectancy and thus the rising numbers of old people (Conrad & Riedel-Heller 2016: 39). A theory that is widely acknowledged nowadays is the “*activity theory*” which equalizes well-being and good life quality with physical, social, and cognitive activity. Nevertheless, it fails to investigate the individual life circumstances that determine a certain behaviour or the level of activity (Conrad & Rieder-Heller 2016: 33). Therefore, the questionnaire “*WHOQOL-OLD*” was developed to record the subjective life quality in old age. It is available in several languages and includes six age-relevant aspects: sensory functions; autonomy; activities in the past, present, and future; social participation; death anxiety; intimacy. Thus, it enables its users to approach life quality as a multidimensional construct (ibid: 44f.). According to Repetti & Calasanti (2024: 6), many older people experience insecurity and uncertainties nowadays because of ageism, a form of discrimination and exclusion based on age.

3.2 Relationships and intimacy

Intimacy refers to a strong relationship between two or more individuals (Busse 1991: 23) and develops as a result of common values, attitudes, and actions (Karl 1991: 2). The physical and emotional intimacy changes with increasing age and adapts to the different life circumstances (ibid: 2). Baas & Schmitt (2020: 484) explain that marriage is the most common form of living together in old age. Thus, about 75% of the men and 66% of the women in their seventies are married. The higher the age, the more women are widowed because of a lower age at marriage and a higher life expectancy than men. On the contrary, many men live in a relationship until the day they die (ibid: 484). According to Busch (2008: 133f.), a supportive relationship is strongly related to health and well-being in old age because the partner is usually the most important contact person. On the other hand, conflicts and communication issues can worsen the life quality (ibid: 133f.). Nevertheless, the forms of living together have become more versatile, so middle-aged people especially live without a partner or file for divorce more often (Engstler & Tesch-Römer 2010: 168f.). In old age, men are more likely to experience the problem of lacking support from a partner or the family. However, by establishing a new relationship, isolation and loneliness can be prevented (ibid: 185).

3.3 Integration

Integration is the peaceful and voluntary merging of different nations and their societies by transcending geographical and economic borders (Giering & Möller 2010: 135). In contrast to migration, a national and even international phenomenon, integration is a process to happen on a local level (Haug & Schmidbauer 2020: 69). The first integration approaches in Germany were developed in the 1970s by Heinz Kühn as a result of the increasing migration of foreign workers. In the so-called “*Kühn-Memorandum*,” he demanded strategies to improve the education and political participation of migrants. However, those approaches had not been put into practice until the first national integration plan was developed 20 years later (ibid: 70).

Integration is strongly related to the term “*assimilation*” which Heckmann (2015: 75) defines as a unilateral process of giving up the original culture of the migrants and their descendants in favor of the culture of the immigration country. Opposing to that perception of assimilation is the more recent sociological meaning of the term. Here, assimilation is referred to in the context of reducing differences between heterogeneous groups of people (ibid: 77).

3.4 Poverty in old age

Poverty is a term referring to people whose financial resources are falling below the subsistence level of the country they are living in (Bäcker 2016: 64). Retirees have fewer prospects of a regular income. Consequently, people who experience poverty in old age often cannot improve their situation on their own (Goebel & Grabka 2011: 3). The financial situation of retirees is predestined by their former occupation and income and can almost exclusively be influenced by heritage or donations. Nonetheless, being employed after retirement can reduce the risk of poverty in old age (ibid: 3f.). Still, it is often quite problematic to find an employment in older age (Repetti & Calasanti 2024: 6). Goebel & Grabka (2011: 11) found out that retirees without a partner are more likely to suffer from poverty because there is no second pension to live on. According to Faik & Köhler-Rama (2013: 160f.), there are more reasons for poverty in old age including self-employment, an occupation in the low-wage sector, and long-term unemployment. In addition, unpredictable incidents like illnesses, the loss of a family member, or the need for care increase the risk of becoming poor in the later years of life (Brettschneider & Klammer 2016: 53). To prevent poverty in old age in future generations, the work arrangements and wages have to be adjusted on one hand. On the other hand, unemployment has to be further reduced (Bäcker 2016: 76).

4. Methods

To find reasons that contribute to the retiree's decision to leave Thailand in favor of Germany and to outline the organization and procedures of their return, guided interviews were conducted in May and June 2023. The four interviewees included a German retiree intending to leave Thailand, an employee at "Deutscher Hilfsverein Thailand e.V." (abbreviated with DHV Thailand), and two self-employed owners of retirement facilities (see Table 1).

There were some criteria that the potential interview partners had to fulfill to be suitable for the research. The retirement facility owners had to speak German or English to enable communication with the interviewer. The employee at "DHV Thailand" had to be involved in organizing and planning returns to Germany. Lastly, the person intending to return had to originally come from Germany and had to be a retiree at the time the interviews were conducted.

The guided interview was chosen to examine the different perspectives of the interviewees on the research topic and to gather specific information from them. It is characterized by a sequence of open questions that can be answered by the interviewees. However, the sequence can be altered, and it is possible to leave out some questions or rephrase them (Mayer 2013: 37).

Table 1: Conducted interviews

#	Name	Age	Category	Occupation	Form of interview
1	Hans Hufschmid	ca. 60	interview with owner of a retirement facility (Prosana Care Thailand)	self-employed	Video call (with interview guide)
2	Hans-Jörg Jäger	ca. 60	interview with owner of a retirement facility (Lance's Residenz Thailand)	self-employed	Video call (with interview guide)
3	anonymous	ca. 40	interview with an employee at "Deutscher Hilfsverein Thailand e.V."	employed, voluntary work	Phone call (with interview guide)
4	anonymous	67	interview with a retiree who wants to return to Germany	retiree	Video call (with interview guide)

Once the interviews had been conducted, the interviewer transcribed them word by word. Text passages that were considered irrelevant for the research question were shortened and summarized. The interviews were analyzed qualitatively using the interpretative-reductive approach by Lamnek (2016: 381).

5. The Failure of Transnational Retirement Migration to Thailand

The interviewees mentioned different reasons that can contribute to an unsuccessful retirement migration to Thailand and thus increase the probability of a return to Germany. Overall, four

categories have been identified: the financial circumstances of the retirees and their families, lacking language skills, interpersonal and integration problems, and failed relationships or marriages.

5.1 Financial circumstances of the retirees and their families

The transnational migration of retirees to Thailand is strongly related to the wish to improve their life quality due to lower costs of living and, as a result, reducing the risk of poverty in the later years of life (Husa et al. 2014: 137). Still, the financial situation of the retirees and their families also influences the life after the migration to the Southeast Asian country. Different problems, depending on the individual circumstances of the retirees, can lead to an unsuccessful migration and consequently to a return to Germany.

The owner of the care facility “Lanee’s Residenz” in the Northeast of Thailand, explains the connection between the financial situation of the retirees and their families and the probability of a return in his interview. Since the opening of his accommodation in 2012, he has already experienced two returns of female retirees from Thailand back to Germany. Both returns were initiated by the children of the women. According to interviewee 2, they needed to find another care facility because the prices in Thailand were too high to pay them permanently. Cheaper alternatives can be found in Eastern Europe, especially Poland or the Czech Republic (Interviewee 2). So, the failure of the transnational retirement migration to Thailand does not necessarily implicate a permanent residence in the retirees’ home country; it rather leads to another shift of their domicile. Furthermore, the development of new accommodations in Eastern Europe results in increasing competition for Thailand as shorter distances to Germany might be an important aspect for choosing a suitable home for the retirees.

The owner of the care facility “Prosana” in Hua Hin, shares this point of view and states that money is an important aspect that contributes to the failure of the retirement migration to Thailand. According to him, it is sometimes even more important than the well-being of the retirees. He explains that some families have no choice but to bring the migrants back to Germany because of their insufficient financial resources (Interviewee 1).

The financial situation can also become quite problematic for retirees who do not need care and thus live in Thailand independently. Interviewee 4 claims that the reason for those problems is an incorrect evaluation of the costs of living in the country. He states that if the retirees want to keep their “German standard”, the expenses will be even higher than in their home country. The Thai standard of living may be cheaper but for many migrants, it is not attractive as it doesn’t

fulfill the wish for an improved life quality (Kaiser 2011: 60). According to interviewee 4, a successful retirement migration of Germans to Thailand is strongly related to their financial situation; if the financial resources are relatively low, it is more likely that problems after the migration occur.

Another problem lies in the pension insurance in Thailand (Interviewee 3). As the German pension insurance is not valid in the country, the migrants have to find a Thai insurance. But many times, they cannot pay for it. Additionally, some health insurance companies neglect retirees with pre-existing health issues. As a result, German migrants might reconsider their decision and prefer the security of their home country (Interviewee 2). As long as they are not dependent on any medical treatment, one can assume that financial difficulties might be less common.

If a retiree does not have sufficient financial resources and the family and friends cannot support him or her either, DHV Thailand is allowed to pay for some medical treatments. However, according to interviewee 3, the possibility of financial aid is determined by a committee with regard to the success of the treatment or the illness.

To sum up, the financial circumstances of the retirees and their families and the above-mentioned problems strongly influence the failure of the transnational retirement migration from Germany to Thailand.

5.2 Lack of language skills

Thai is a tonal language which means that there are different kinds of tones: high, medium, and low, and in addition a rising and a falling tone. The meaning of a word depends on the chosen tone so pronunciation mistakes can change a sentence completely (Interviewee 4). If German retirees do not have a basic knowledge of Thai, significant problems in their daily lives might arise and have a negative impact on their life quality.

A huge number of German retirees have difficulties to learn the local language. Usually, their vocabulary is limited to saying “Thanks” or “You’re welcome” and ordering a drink at a bar (Interviewee 4). Betty & Hall (2015: 131) explained similar problems. They found out that the lack of language skills has a negative impact on the migrant’s lives in the destination country (ibid). One can assume that most of the German migrants haven’t had any contact with the Thai language before going abroad because they have only visited the country for a shorter period, for example on vacation.

According to interviewee 3, the lack of language skills becomes especially problematic if the retirees have to go to a doctor's appointment or the hospital. They cannot explain their symptoms because they don't speak Thai. And usually, German is not spoken by the staff in Thailand's hospitals (Interviewee 3). As a result, it might be possible that without a common language, misunderstandings between the retirees and doctors can occur. In the worst case, it can lead to the wrong treatment of the existing health issue. Besides those difficulties, the lack of language skills also constitutes an obstacle in administrative procedures. Interviewee 4 states that German is not spoken there either, so the migrants will be overwhelmed if they do not manage to learn a little bit of Thai.

Not speaking the local language can even be considered problematic concerning the German-speaking care facilities in Thailand. According to interviewee 2, the retirees in his accommodation can always speak their mother tongue. Nevertheless, in the Southeast Asian country, geriatric care is a field of work that only Thai people can be employed in (Interviewee 1). Consequently, the lack of communication between the employees and the retirees in those care facilities should be examined critically. One might argue that without verbal communication the migrants cannot build up interpersonal relationships with the staff.

Apart from Thai, the English language can be considered important for a transnational retirement migration. Thailand is part of the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations*, where English is the common language of interaction. So, one could assume that the language skills of Thailand's inhabitants are relatively high. But this is not the case. Many people cannot speak English even in large cities, like the capital Bangkok. As a result, communicating with locals, apart from tourist hot spots, is nearly impossible (Interviewee 4).

The interviews showed that the German retirees do not share a common language with the majority of Thailand's inhabitants. In some special cases, the lack of language skills does not only influence doctor's appointments or administrative procedures. It can also have an impact on the private life. That happens if a retiree lives in a relationship with or is even married to a Thai. Interviewee 4 knows such a case and explains that the communication between that husband and wife is based on body language and facial expressions only.

As a result of the communication issues, many retirees have to rely on other people and cannot spend their lives as independently as expected. That can lead to a feeling of frustration and unhappiness. So, the migrants might question their decision to go to Thailand and some might eventually decide to return to Germany.

5.3 Interpersonal and integration conflicts

After the transnational migration to Thailand, the German retirees have to build up their “new” lives in a different environment. On one hand, they must meet new people who can support them and prevent isolation. On the other hand, the retirees have to get acquainted with the social system and the values and norms of the country (Heckmann 2015: 71). Nevertheless, different interpersonal or integration conflicts can challenge them, thus lowering the chances of a successful migration to the Southeast Asian country.

The retirees who live in care facilities spend a lot of time with the other residents, which strengthens their social relationships with them. But this form of living together can also lead to different conflicts. Interviewee 2 explained that after a disagreement the retirees are sometimes pretty mad at each other and do not want to talk to the other person anymore. An unsolved interpersonal conflict has even resulted in the termination of the rental agreement (Interviewee 2).

The German migrants who live in a care facility seem to only stay in contact with the other residents and the staff because they do not spend much time outside of their accommodation. According to interviewee 2, there is almost no interaction between the residents and the people living in the surrounding villages of “Lanee’s Residenz”. In Thailand, it is also uncommon to join a club, for example a sports club, which is widespread in Europe (Interviewee 2). As a result, the retirees do not have many chances to get to know locals which makes integration into Thai society difficult.

The German retirees who live in Thailand independently only tend to develop social ties within German communities too. Interviewee 4 states that some boroughs in Bangkok are predominantly inhabited by the so-called “*farangs*”. *Farangs* are people who moved to Thailand but have their origin in a Western country. Thus, the segregation between foreign and local people is quite problematic in cities too. One aspect that is strongly related to the lack of integration of German retirees is their language skills. The lower their Thai skills are, the more unlikely they will be having conversations with locals. Howard (2008: 156) shared similar results in his study. He stated that the interviewed retirees from the United States of America, Great Britain, and Australia mostly stay in contact with people who migrated to Thailand as well.

Besides the above-mentioned interpersonal or integration conflicts, the Thai government has developed clear regulations for visa applicants who want to become permanent residents in the country, like German retirees. Apparently, migrants have to apply for their visa once a year,

regardless of the previous length of their stay in Thailand (Interviewee 4). Additionally, they must visit the immigration office every three months as proof of their stay. One can assume that the feeling of insecurity concerning the allowance to stay in Thailand can be an aspect that contributes to the failure of the transnational retirement migration so that the retirees might prefer social security in Germany.

In addition to that, interviewee 4 shared his experiences with the Thai authorities stating that they have a negative attitude towards foreign people. That attitude is also common among the inhabitants of Thailand which becomes apparent when having a closer look at the political parties. The right-wing party with the English translation „Thai people love Thai people” has a very high reputation (Interviewee 4). Furthermore, Howard (2008: 157) described that retirement migrants, regardless of their origin, do not feel appreciated and welcomed, especially by Thai men. Those results are in contrast with the caring and respectful behavior of the geriatric nurses in the care facilities that Bender & Schweppe (2015: 126f) have mentioned in their study.

To conclude, one can see that the integration of German retirees into Thai society fails. That is a result of the barely existing interactions between them and the locals as well as a lack of interest on the part of many Thai people. Both problems seem to reinforce each other and thus favor negative attitudes towards integration shown by the Thai government. Moreover, the strict regulations for a residence permit in the Southeast Asian country hinder the German migrants from developing a new life. So, the interpersonal and integration conflicts can be evaluated as aspects that contribute to the failure of the transnational retirement migration to Thailand.

5.4 Failed relationships and marriages

A wish that influences the decision of many German, almost exclusively male, retirees to spend the later years of life in Thailand is the development of a romantic relationship with a Thai woman (Bender & Schweppe 2022: 118). The men are predominantly searching for a long-term relationship in the Southeast Asian country. However, many of those relationships and also marriages eventually turn out to be failures. That leaves the affected retirees deeply disappointed and can even cause serious problems regarding their financial circumstances or living conditions.

Interviewee 2 and interviewee 4 both described the stereotype of an older man with a Thai woman by his side. Those relationships can originate from previous holidays that the German migrants have spent in Thailand before retiring (Interviewee 4). Given this information, one

can argue that it is quite problematic that the couple has only seen each other during the visits and thus hasn't had much time to get to know the other person.

Sometimes the retired men have never had any personal interaction with a Thai woman before starting their new life in the Southeast Asian country. According to interviewee 2, they come to Thailand and immediately fall in love with a girl in her 20s. It seems particularly noticeable that the age difference contrasts with the common perception of an ideal relationship in Germany. Furthermore, the choice of the term "girl" indicates that Thai women are indeed very young, and, in some cases, they have just reached adulthood. Thus, it can be questioned if two people of such different age groups can share similar interests and goals in life.

Interviewee 4 showed a critical attitude towards huge age differences and uttered that relationships like that will not last longer than one year. Generally speaking, the relationships are considered unsuccessful, and the German retirees often become a target of ridicule. The main reason for that is the media presentation on German television showing the stereotype of a 70-year-old man with his 25-year-old wife on the beach (Interviewee 4). Interviewee 4 explained that those documentaries are completely exaggerated. Nevertheless, some serious problems can occur because of the German-Thai relationships.

The first problem after the migration to Thailand arises as a result of many Thai women quitting their jobs because of the advantageous financial situation of the retirees (Interviewee 4). Bender & Schweppe (2022: 125) agree with that and state in their article that German men have a high reputation in the Southeast Asian country because of their financial reserves. Thus, the financial situation of the retirees and their relationships are strongly related to each other. One can assume that their financial reserves decrease continuously as two people need to make a living. Furthermore, the relatives of the Thai women are usually supported as well, which increases the loss of the retirees' fortunes (Interviewee 4). Bender & Schweppe (2022: 131ff) come to the same conclusion and explain that money transfers to Thai families can lead to a higher vulnerability of the men and difficulties in the relationship.

Interviewee 2 uttered that the German men behave naive and trusting regarding the affection of their Thai lovers. Even after a short time of living together, they seem to believe that their relationship is everlasting and that there can be no doubt about the existing feelings (Interviewee 2). Interviewee 4 didn't share that point of view and stated that the retirees know about the pure functionality of those relationships. He continued that they are like a love business that is advantageous for both sides. Given this information, it becomes apparent that the above-

mentioned functionality contrasts with the initial wish of the men to search for a fulfilling relationship in Thailand.

After migrating to Thailand, many retirees move to rural areas of the country to live with the family of the Thai woman. There they are encouraged to build a detached house using their own financial reserves again. As foreign people are forbidden to own real estate in Thailand (Jöstl & Wieser 2011: 169), the German men get into a precarious situation. Lafferty & Maher (2020: 1643) also discovered the dependence of retirees on Thai families in their study. Based on this information, one can argue that the retirees do not reflect upon their expenses sufficiently. However, the behaviour of Thai women must be taken into consideration as well because they encourage them to make certain decisions (Interviewee 4). So, it becomes apparent that many women exploit their partner's financial resources which threatens the financial and social situation of the German retirees.

Another aspect that contributes to the disadvantageous circumstances of the migrants is a traditional wedding, the so-called "Thai Buddhist Wedding" which is of utter importance for Thai families. The problem that emerges is that this kind of marriage ceremony is not officially approved (Interviewee 4) which still leaves the retirees with no rights to own real estate in the Southeast Asian country.

Eventually, the German men are confronted with reality (Interviewee 4). In his interview, the retiree living in Thailand explained that the Thai women are often unfaithful and betray their German husbands with another partner. Interviewee 2 agreed and said that the relationship usually ends once the financial reserves of the retirees are exhausted. Lafferty & Maher (2020: 1638f) showed similar results in their study.

To conclude, failed marriages and relationships are important reasons that contribute to an unsuccessful retirement migration to Thailand and can lead to precarious financial and social circumstances. As a result of the failed relationships, the retirees experience deep emotional disappointment. Furthermore, they are unable to afford a return to Germany and become dependent on others. According to interviewee 2, living in Thailand on their own is impossible too, so the return migration can be referred to as an irreversible process.

6. Organization and procedures of the return

Despite the initial wish of the German retirees to spend their last years of life in Thailand, the above-mentioned aspects lead to a less successful retirement migration than expected. As a

result, returning back to their home country is often the only option. Depending on the individual circumstances of the migrants, the return has to be organized well to prevent the emergence of new problems. In many cases, there are more people involved to support the retirees in different ways.

After migrating to the Southeast Asian country, many retirees live in nursing homes where they are taken care of all day. Interviewee 2 states that the migrants are also supported if they have to return to Germany, regardless of the reason for it. Interviewee 1 shares these thoughts and explains that the retirees in his care facility cannot travel alone anymore and thus need a nurse, for example, to accompany them on their flight. On the other hand, family members can come to Thailand and fly back together with the migrants (Interviewee 2).

The retirees, who live in Thailand independently, often organize their return together with family members and friends from Germany using technical devices and social networks to exchange information (Interviewee 4). That can be problematic for retirees who are not familiar with modern technology and thus feel overwhelmed communicating in that way. However, not all of the migrants need help organizing their return. If they are in good health condition, they can plan it on their own (Interviewee 3). As stated by interviewee 3, the retirees should start to deal with their financial situation and a new domicile at least one or two months in advance. If they do not have any social connections to Germany or are in a bad health condition, the DHV is an important organization that can provide help (Interviewee 3). 99% of the precautionary motions come from men. Mostly, they need help finding a new accommodation in Germany that lies within their budget (Interviewee 3). Furthermore, the expensive but obligatory health insurance in Germany can become problematic (Interviewee 4).

Besides the organization, the costs for the return flights can also exceed the financial reserves of the migrants. Schweppe (2022: 191) found out that the employees of DHV Thailand can communicate with the affected retirees regularly. The organization can pay the return to Germany, but only if no relatives or friends are able or willing to support the migrants and they cannot afford it themselves. According to interviewee 3, the DHV enables all help seekers to eventually return to their home country. Thus, it is the only voluntary organization in Thailand and also worldwide that provides help for German people who are in distress.

In case of medical emergencies or accidents, the return to Germany cannot be planned in advance and has to be carried out as fast as possible. The organization is then limited to booking a flight and finding a flight attendant with medical knowledge (Interviewee 3). It becomes apparent that the time of the unorganized return migration is much shorter compared to the

organized form so many retirees already arrive in Germany after a few days (Interviewee 3). Additionally, some German migrants have to return to their home country if they don't have an allowance to stay in Thailand anymore. The interviews didn't clarify if the retirees didn't apply for the visa to continue their stay or if the government rejected their stay, though.

To conclude, the return migration turns out to depend on the individual living conditions of the migrants and can range from a well-planned to a completely unorganized procedure, which eventually results in leaving the Southeast Asian country in favor of Germany.

7. Conclusion

Thailand has been one of the most common destinations for retirement migrants from all over the world for centuries as a result of the development of the tourism industry initiated by the government. This article aimed to examine aspects contributing to a failing transnational retirement migration of German retirees to the Southeast Asian country and investigated how they are related. Key findings are:

The financial situation of the retirees and their relatives is strongly related to an unsuccessful retirement migration to Thailand. If the family members of migrants who need care don't have the financial resources to pay for a care facility in the long term, a return to Germany can be the result. On the other hand, cheaper care facilities emerging in Eastern Europe can become an alternative for those families. Retirees who live in Thailand independently can suffer from financial problems because of an underestimation of the cost of living or the expensive pension insurance that many cannot afford.

Lacking language skills are a common problem after retirement migration. The German migrants struggle to learn Thai and can barely communicate with locals. This can lead to insecurities and misunderstandings at doctor's appointments, administrative procedures, and even at home. Additionally, the majority of Thai people don't speak English, so there is no common language to communicate in.

Furthermore, it became apparent that interpersonal and integration conflicts can challenge the development of a "new" life in a different environment. Interpersonal conflicts can occur in care facilities because residents see each other every day. Regardless of the retirees' living situation (i.e., in a care facility or independently in an apartment or house), they rarely form social ties with Thai people. In addition, some Thai people and local authorities show a negative attitude towards foreigners, and even the government prevents retirement migrants from staying in the country because of the strict visa regulations.

Moreover, failed marriages and relationships in Thailand harm a successful retirement migration. German-Thai relationships are very often characterized by a huge age difference and the financial dependence of mostly female Thai women on the wealthier retirees. As a result of different expenses, the monetary resources of the migrants decrease continuously, which can lead to financial insecurities in the long term. In addition to that, the interviews showed that many Thai women are unfaithful and betray the retirees with another partner.

Concerning the organization and procedures of the return to Germany, many retirees are being supported by other people. In case of an individually planned return, the migrants should start preparing at least one or two months in advance. However, many returns cannot be planned because of illnesses, accidents, or expired visas. Under such circumstances, the retirees must leave Thailand within a few days. The interviews pointed out that the unorganized, forced form is far more common for returns to Germany.

Regardless of the new findings on unsuccessful transnational retirement migration to Thailand, the low number of interviews can be seen as a limitation of this study. It especially lacks the perspective of a return migrant; for this survey, it was impossible to find a suitable person. In future studies, this perspective should be analyzed in detail as it might provide personal insight into the migration processes. Moreover, the retirement migration to other countries, as well as the comparison of care facilities concerning their offers and the quality of care, should be investigated in future studies.

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