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Methodological aspects of labour market data

10|2025 EN Harmonization of Occupational and Regional Variables between GAV and IEB

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Harmonization of Occupational and Regional Variables between GAV and IEB

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Die FDZ-Methodenreporte befassen sich mit den methodischen Aspekten der Daten des FDZ und helfen somit Nutzerinnen und Nutzern bei der Analyse der Daten. Nutzerinnen und Nutzer können hierzu in dieser Reihe zitationsfähig publizieren und stellen sich der öffentlichen Diskussion.

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Zusammenfassung

Dieser Bericht dokumentiert die Harmonisierung von Berufs- und Regionalvariablen zwischen zwei administrativen Datensätzen: dem Datenspeicher Gesellschaftliches Arbeitsvermögen (GAV) der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (DDR) und den Integrierten Erwerbsbiografien (IEB) der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Die Verknüpfung kombiniert demografische und arbeitsmarktbezogene Daten von 1989 mit Erwerbsverläufen nach 1992 und ermöglicht Analysen ostdeutscher Arbeitsmarktbiografien rund um die Wiedervereinigung. Die Berufsharmonisierung erfolgt in zwei Schritten, indem detaillierte DDR-Codes in standardisierte Klassifikationen von 2010 und 1988 überführt werden. Die Regionalharmonisierung ordnet DDR-Ortseinheiten von 1989 manuell den Kreisgrenzen von 2014 zu und wird durch moderne geobasierte Methoden überprüft. Die hohe Übereinstimmungsquote und die robuste Validierung gewährleisten, dass der resultierende harmonisierte Datensatz eine verlässliche Grundlage für die longitudinale Arbeitsmarktforschung darstellt.

Abstract

This report documents the harmonization of occupational and regional variables between two administrative datasets: the Data Fund of Societal Work Power (GAV) of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Integrated Employment Biographies (IEB) of the Federal Republic of Germany. The linkage combines demographic and labor market data from 1989 with employment histories post-1992, enabling analysis of East German labor market trajectories around reunification. Occupational harmonization follows a two-step process, converting detailed GDR codes into the standardized 2010 and 1988 classification systems. Regional harmonization employs both manual mapping and modern geospatial techniques to align 1989 GDR locations with 2014 county boundaries. The high match rate and robust validation ensure that the resulting harmonized dataset is a reliable resource for longitudinal labor market research.

Keywords

GAV, GAV-ADIAB, GAV-IEB, IEB, KldB 1988, KldB 2010, Occupations, Regions

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1 Introduction

In this report, we document the harmonization of key variables across two administrative datasets: the *Data Fund of Societal Work Power (GAV)*[1], obtained from the Federal Archives in Germany, and the *Integrated Employment Biographies (IEB)* of the German Federal Employment Agency, provided by the Institute for Employment Research (IAB).

The GAV data provide information on demographics and labor market characteristics of workers in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1989. The IEB data contain the complete employment and earnings histories of all workers covered by the social security system in the Federal Republic of Germany. The datasets were linked to construct 'Labor Market Trajectories of East Germans around Reunification'—a joint project of the Research Data Centre (FDZ) of the BA at the IAB and Humboldt-University Berlin (Zimmermann et al., 2025a). For more details on the initial record linkage, see Liepmann and Müller (2018); for technical documentation of subsequent improvements, see Antoni (2018).

Following the successful linkage at the individual level, we harmonized occupational and regional information across the GAV and IEB data. The resulting dataset enables the analysis of occupational and regional mobility among individuals from the former GDR over time.

In section 2, we provide a more detailed description of the two data sources and their linkage. Section 3 outlines the harmonization procedure. Section 4 concludes.

2 Data

GAV

The GAV is a large, cross-sectional dataset that contains information on demographics and labor market characteristics of workers in the GDR in 1989. The data were collected by the Government Agency for Labor and Wages (*Staatssekretariat für Arbeit und Löhne*) to inform central planning (Gebauer et al., 2004).[2] More specifically, firms and establishments were required to report information on their employees to the district councils. This information formed the basis of the GAV dataset. Although the data were compiled annually, only the final version—dated December 31, 1989—has been preserved.[3]

The GAV data cover around 7 million workers with permanent or temporary work contracts. They include members of producers' cooperative societies (*Produktionsgenossenschaften*) and law firms (*Rechtsanwaltskollegien*), retired individuals still working, and men performing compulsory military service or alternative civilian service (Dietz and Rudolph, 1990; Rathje, 1996; Gebauer et al., 2004). As with most official GDR statistics, the GAV data exclude the so-called *Sector X* which comprises individuals working for the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of State Security, the

[1] In German: 'Datenspeicher Gesellschaftliches Arbeitsvermögen'.

[2] Neither the original GAV data nor analytical results based on these data were made publicly available in the GDR.

[3] Due to limited computing capacity in the GDR, only data from the current year were kept, whereas data from previous years were deleted (Gebauer et al., 2004).

Socialist Unity Party, the army, or customs authorities. Additionally, separate databases existed for specific subgroups, such as certain types of teachers and childcare workers, which are thus only partially included in the GAV.[4] Overall, the data cover about 72% of the East German labor force in 1989.

For those workers included in the GAV data, rich information on demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, municipality of residence, number of children under 14, disability status, marital status, nationality), human capital (e.g., high school education, current apprenticeship training, university degree), employment characteristics (e.g., type of employment, place of employment, leave of absence, main job task, job status, work hours, occupation), as well as firm characteristics (e.g., firm type and industry) are available.

IEB

The IEB data comprise administrative records on the complete employment and earnings histories of all workers covered by the German social security system. They include information from two sources: social security notifications and internal processes of the Federal Employment Agency. The social security notifications provide detailed information on the start and end dates of employment episodes subject to social security contributions, along with data on gross wages, education, employment status, occupation, and nationality. In addition, every employer liable for social security contributions is required to submit at least one notification annually. The administrative records do not include the self-employed, civil servants, and military personnel.[5] These employment histories are available from 1975 onward for workers in West Germany and from 1992 onward for workers in East Germany.[6] The data from internal processes of the Federal Employment Agency are organized into four distinct history files covering unemployment spells, benefit receipts, active labor market policy measures, and job-seeking histories of individuals.

Combined GAV-IEB data

The linkage between GAV and IEB data was initially conducted by Liepmann and Müller (2018) and then further refined by Antoni (2018). The non-anonymized versions of both datasets were linked through information on first names, last names, exact dates of birth, and gender.[7] Three restrictions were imposed when drawing from the universe of individuals in the IEB data. Only individuals were included (1) who were born between 1929 and 1976, i.e., aged 13 to 70 in 1989; (2) for whom the IEB contains at least one (employment) episode between 1990 and 1996 in East or West Germany; (3) without a recorded (employment) episode in West Germany before 1990. Because of

[4] The data exclude teachers in schools and childcare workers, but include teachers at vocational schools, professors at universities, and employees in nurseries. Moreover, the GAV data exclude the self-employed and their employees. However, as the majority of craftsmen were members of producers' cooperative societies, most are included in the GAV. The data also include apprentices who began their training in the year preceding December 1989. Foreigners temporarily working in the GDR under the coverage of intergovernmental agreements are excluded, while the data include foreign GDR residents.

[5] In 1995, 79.4% of all workers in West Germany were covered by social security and were therefore recorded in the data (FEA, 1996).

[6] As the East German labor market administration had to be integrated into the West German administration, data from East Germany are only fully available from 1992 onward.

[7] It would have been possible to rely on additional information regarding occupations, industries, and regions. However, the IEB data are fully available for East Germans only from 1992 onwards. Between 1989 and 1992, a significant fraction of East Germans changed jobs and moved between regions. Hence, using this additional information would likely have oversampled individuals who remained in the same job or region.

the third restriction, many West Germans are excluded from the linkage procedure, reducing the likelihood of false matches. At the same time, the restriction implies that we neglect individuals who migrated from West to East Germany before the Fall of the Berlin Wall. However, only very few West Germans moved to the GDR during this period.

77% of individuals from the GAV data have a match in the IEB data. According to experience from previous linkages performed at the Research Data Center of the Federal Employment Agency, this is considered a strong match rate. For most matches (88%), the information on first and last names, dates of birth, and gender was identical in the GAV and the IEB data. The remaining fraction was matched using record linkage techniques that tolerate a justifiable margin of error while keeping the likelihood of false matches as small as possible. Only cases with a unique match were retained. The match rate is substantially higher for individuals aged 60 or below in 1989. If older workers are excluded, the match rate increases to 82%. With an age limit of 50 in 1989, the match rate rises even further to 86%. Furthermore, the match rate is lower for women than for men. For women younger than 60 in 1989, it amounts to 77%, around ten percentage points lower than their male counterparts.

The GAV-ADIAB, the combined GAV-IEB data (Zimmermann et al., 2025a; Zimmermann et al., 2025b), enable analyses of the labor market trajectories of East Germans around reunification in much more detail than earlier studies.[8] In particular, the data provide each individual's occupation, industry, place of work, establishment, type of employment, and municipality of residence in 1989, combined with their employment histories from 1992 onwards.

3 Harmonization

To study mobility across occupations and regions, we harmonize key variables across the GAV and IEB data. Both datasets used different classification systems for occupations and regions. In addition, extensive local government reorganization after reunification altered the names, boundaries, and number of counties and municipalities between 1989 (the year of the GAV data) and 2014 (the reference year for regional boundaries in the version of the IEB data used for the link). In the following, we describe how we harmonized these variables across both data sources.

3.1 Occupations

The GAV data list occupations according to a GDR classification at the 7-digit level, distinguishing between 3,359 occupations. The IEB data contain occupation codes based on the 1988 occupational classification system (`beruf`) at the 3-digit level (KldB 1988) and the 2010 classification (`beruf2010_4`) at the 4-digit level (KldB 2010). Combining the 4-digit 2010 occupation code with

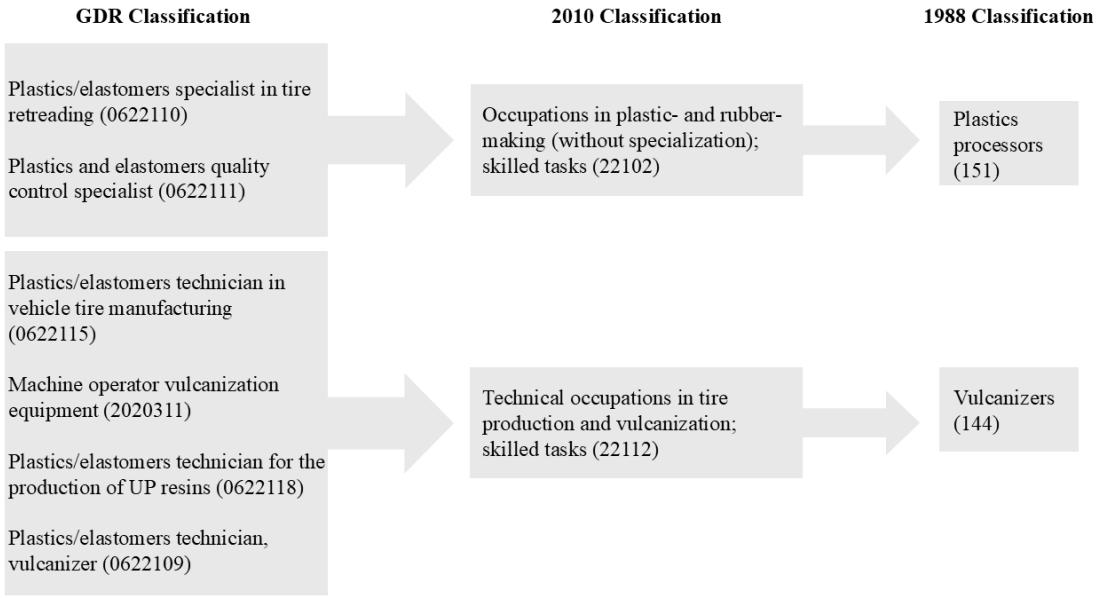
[8] Earlier studies on the labor market trajectories of East Germans used, for example, the BASiD data (Emmler and Fitzenberger 2020), Microcensus (Fuchs-Schündeln and Schündeln 2009), aggregated unemployment or migration data (Fuchs-Schündeln and Izem 2012), or the GSOEP (Burda and Hunt 2001; Hunt 2006; Fuchs-Schündeln and Izem 2012; Stauder 2018; Emmler and Fitzenberger 2020). The main advantages of the combined GAV-IEB data are the large sample size and rich information on the employment situation in 1989, in combination with the employment history after 1992.

the required skill level (`niveau`) allows the construction of a corresponding 5-digit 2010 occupation variable (`beruf2010_5`). The 2010 occupation codes are thus more granular and more comparable to the GDR occupations. However, they are available only from 2011 onwards.

We proceed in two steps to harmonize the occupational information from the GDR with that in the IEB data. First, we manually transcode the GDR occupations into 2010 occupation codes. Two independent teams of research assistants transcoded the occupations to ensure the accuracy of the transcoding. Second, we transcode the 2010 codes into the more aggregated 1988 occupation codes using the official correspondence provided by the Federal Employment Agency (FEA, 2011). This procedure reduces the complexity of the occupational classification. It enables us to reliably assign GDR occupations to the coarser system of the occupations in reunified Germany in 1988, at the expense of some detail in the skill level within occupations that is not captured in the 1988 occupation classification system. However, as information at this level of detail is not available in the IEB from 1992 to 2010, we believe that our procedure generates the most robust assignment achievable.

Figure 1 provides an illustration of the procedure. It demonstrates the mapping of granular GDR occupations into comparatively broader 2010 occupations. For instance, we assign *plastics and elastomers quality control specialists (0622111)* — a highly specialized occupation — to *occupations in plastic and rubber making (without specialization); skilled tasks (22102)* — a more general, yet still skilled, occupation. This initial mapping is subsequently extended by linking the 2010 occupation code to the broader 1988 occupation code of *plastics processors (151)*, which no longer reflects the required skill or specialization level. The transcoding process follows a logical order from the most detailed (GDR classification), to less detailed (2010 classification), and finally to the least detailed occupation codes (1988 classification), maximizing mapping accuracy as occupational specificity is progressively reduced. Transcoding to the 1988 classification reduces the potential for classification errors, albeit at the cost of higher precision.

Figure 1: Illustration of Occupation Code Transcoding



Notes: Occupation description followed by occupation code in parentheses.

Source: Own illustration.

3.2 Regions

Both datasets include information on municipalities or counties. The GAV data specify the municipality (or county) of residence and the location of the employee's establishment based on 1989 boundaries and the location codes used in the GDR. In total, the GAV data contain 7,795 unique locality cells. The IEB data include the variables `wo_kreis` and `ao_kreis`, which identify the county of residence and the county in which the employee's establishment is located, respectively. This geographic information in the version of the IEB we used for our analysis referred to territorial boundaries as of 31 December 2014.

Several reforms of local government structures in East Germany after reunification reduced the number of municipalities and counties significantly during the 1990s and 2000s. While there were 303 counties in the GDR in 1989, this number had decreased to 77 by 2014. Hence, we reassigned municipalities and counties in the GAV data to the corresponding counties in reunified Germany as of 2014.

3.2.1 Manual Mapping

For each person in the GAV with information on their municipality of residence or job location in 1989, we assigned the corresponding municipality in 2014 using a municipality-level conversion matrix provided by the IWH Halle (Kauffmann, 2017). We then mapped these municipalities to their respective counties in 2014. In 8 cases, the GAV does not report the municipality but the county in 1989. We used an additional county-level conversion matrix by Kauffmann (2017) for these observations.

Since most county restructurings in the 1990s and 2000s involved aggregating multiple 1989 counties into larger units, we could unambiguously assign most observations to 2014 counties. However, by 2014, 65 counties had been split into multiple new counties due to district reform processes (*Kreisreformen*). In such cases, we assigned GDR workers to the county in 2014, where the largest share of the 1989 county's population resides.

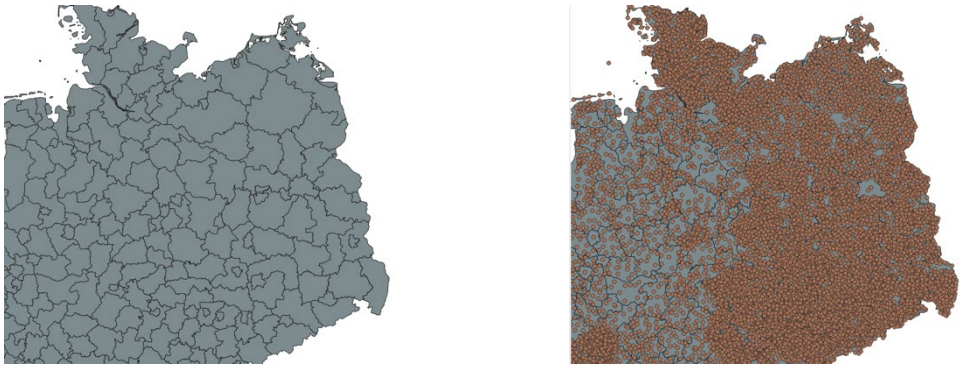
3.2.2 Point-in-Polygon Spatial Mapping

We perform a robustness check based on modern geospatial methods to verify the initial manual mapping. This process involves generating a crosswalk between 1989 GDR municipalities and 2014 counties with geospatial data from the Federal Agency for Cartography and Geodesy (BKG), including shapefiles for georeferenced points representing the location of the municipality center[9] of GDR municipalities in 1989 (BKGa, 2020), and 2014 county polygons (BKGb, 2020). The 2014 county borders in the eastern part of Germany are depicted in Figure 2a.

To establish a mapping between the 1989 GDR municipalities and 2014 counties, we perform a spatial overlap with the georeferenced points representing municipalities and the county polygons.[10] Figure 2b depicts the 1989 municipalities in the eastern part of Germany. Each municipality is geocoded to a specific coordinate, avoiding ambiguities when overlapping them with the 2014 county polygons.

Figure 2: County Borders and Municipality Centroids in East Germany

(a) 2014 County Borders **(b) 1989 Municipality Centroids**



Source: Own illustration based on BKGa(2020) and BKGb (2020).

Handling Missing and Unmatched Data

In 0.62% of cases, 1989 municipality points did not find an exact match in the 2014 counties. These mismatches are primarily due to smaller districts within cities or other finer distinctions not reflected in the georeferenced points. For unmatched municipalities[11], an imputation technique is used, where missing entries are inferred based on the mapping of neighboring municipalities. If

[9] While the exact methodology behind the georeferencing is unclear, the documentation of the historical maps in 1989 (BKGa, 2020) refers to the location of the municipality center that are partly obtained from digitized historical maps.

[10] As the shapefiles use a consistent Coordinate Reference System (CRS: UTM32), this overlap produces a straightforward mapping of municipalities to their corresponding counties.

[11] In total, only 10 GDR municipalities did not match.

two neighboring municipalities are mapped into the same 2014 county, the missing municipality is assumed to belong to the same county. The results are manually checked afterwards.

Quality of the Mapping through Spatial Overlap

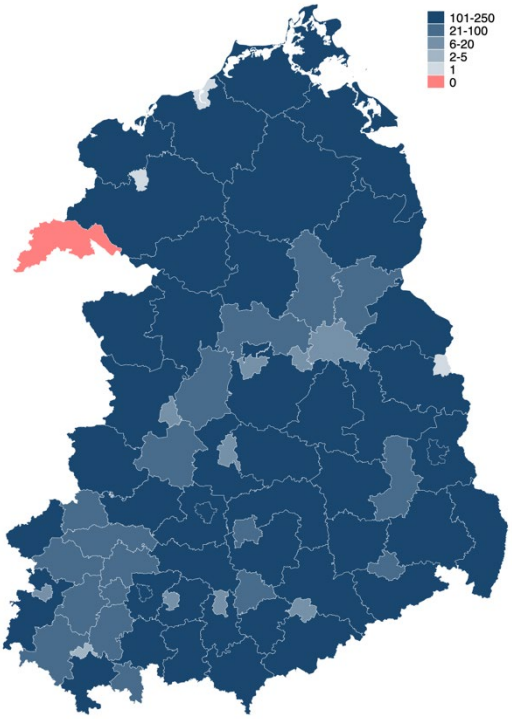
The quality of the crosswalk heavily relies on the granularity of the input datasets, particularly the georeferenced points. The absence of finer administrative units (e.g., districts within cities) may affect the precision of the mapping. Only 0.48% of municipalities require manual mapping due to the lack of finer distinctions in the dataset. These adjustments are essential to ensure that the crosswalk fully reflects the true administrative boundaries.

3.2.3 Comparison of Mapping Methods

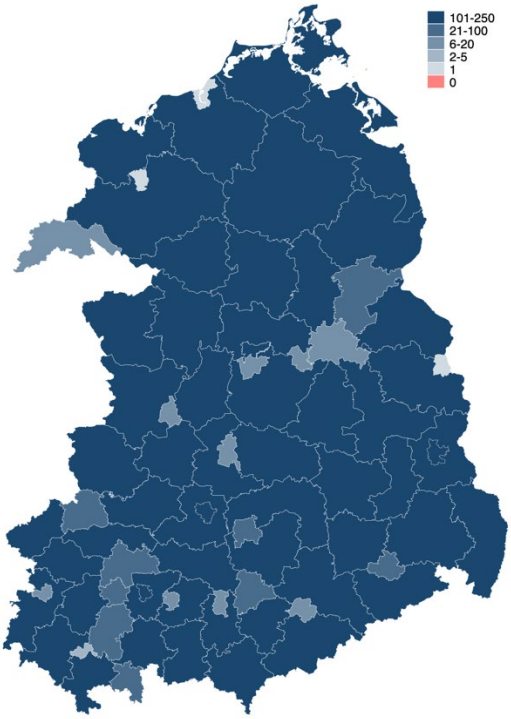
There is some uncertainty in both methods to harmonize the two regional variables. However, we find a relatively high agreement between the two methods and are therefore confident that our harmonization is accurate in the vast majority of cases. Figure 4 shows three different maps in which we compare our manual mapping of the 1989 GDR municipalities to the 2014 counties with the spatial overlap mapping as a robustness check. Map (a) shows the number of GDR municipalities assigned to each county based on the original manual mapping. Map (b) shows the number of

Figure 3: Comparison of Mapping Methods

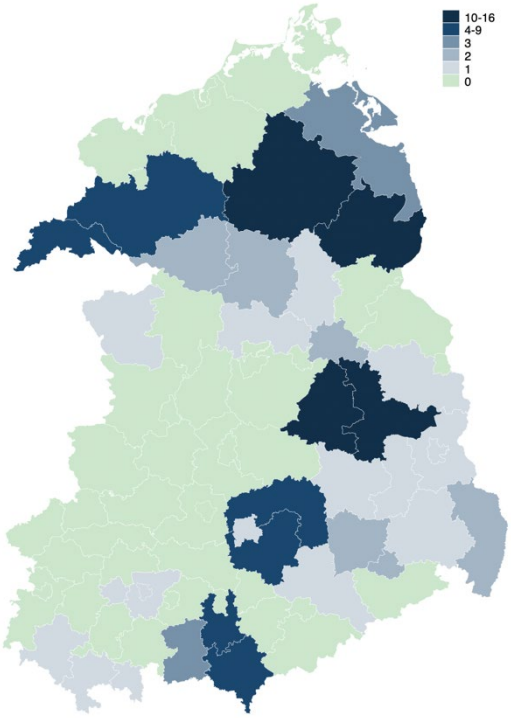
(a) Manual Mapping



(b) Point-in-Polygon Spatial Mapping



(c) Difference



Notes: These maps show the number of GDR municipalities from 1989 assigned to the respective county based on territorial boundaries as of 31 December 2014, according to (a) our manual mapping and (b) a mapping based on spatial overlay (point-in-polygon spatial join). Darker colors indicate a higher number of municipalities assigned to the respective county. Panel (c) shows the absolute value of the difference in the number of municipalities, i.e., $|\Delta M| = |M_b - M_a|$.

Source: Own illustration based on BKGa(2020) and BKGb (2020).

municipalities assigned using a spatial overlay (point-in-polygon spatial join). Darker colors indicate more municipalities assigned to the respective county, whereas red indicates that no municipality is assigned. In general, maps (a) and (b) are very similar, giving us a high degree of confidence in the initial match implemented in the data. More than 100 municipalities are assigned to most counties. However, the slightly larger number of light blue counties in (a) indicates that, in some cases, fewer municipalities were assigned by the original manual process than could have been with the enhanced method used for the robustness check. The West German county of *Lüneburg (03355) is a special case*. Our manual procedure did not assign any GDR municipalities to this county. However, a small part of this West German county, the municipality *Amt Neuhaus*, consists of localities that were part of the GDR territory and were later reassigned to the county of *Lüneburg*, which is why the mapping based on spatial overlap assigned them accordingly.[12]

Finally, map (c) visualizes the absolute value of the difference in the number of municipalities assigned to a county by the spatial mapping vs. our original harmonization procedure, i.e., $|\Delta M| = |M_b - M_a|$. As shown in green, most counties were assigned the same number of municipalities with both methods, demonstrating the high degree of accuracy of the original harmonization. The blue counties indicate some differences. Overall, these differences are limited as the spatial mapping in (b) assigns only one percent of GDR municipalities to different counties compared to the manual manual mapping in (a).

4 Conclusion

The combined, harmonized GAV-IEB data are a valuable resource for studying questions related to the occupational and regional mobility of former GDR workers over time. To accurately analyze outcomes across East and West Germany over time, it was necessary to harmonize information on occupations and regions.

We harmonized occupations in a two-step procedure, mapping from GDR occupations (highest skill detail), to 2010 occupation codes (intermediate detail), and finally to 1988 occupation codes (lowest detail). The stepwise reduction in detail of occupation codes preserves as much information as possible at each stage, while minimizing the potential for classification error.

To harmonize variables on the region of residence and employment in the data, we conducted an extensive manual mapping based on a conversion matrix. This was supplemented with a point-in-polygon spatial mapping robustness check, which employs modern geospatial methods to validate our initial manual mapping. Our robustness check confirmed the validity of the manual mapping to a high degree of accuracy.

With the harmonization of occupational and regional information in the GAV-IEB data, researchers can investigate individuals' employment market histories pre- and post-reunification periods.

[12] The original mapping, however, assigned these eight GDR municipalities (20420, 20436, 20442, 20461, 20483, 20486, 20487, 20493) to the adjacent county of *Ludwigslust-Parchim (13076)*, located to the north-east of Lüneburg.

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