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CHAPTER 6

Social capital in the sun: bonding and bridging social capital among British retirees

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This chapter explores social networks between English-speaking retirees located in Calpe, a municipality on the Costa Blanca, Spain. Using the concept of social capital and the device of leisure, this chapter discusses the systems of social relations and types of social capital found within retirement communities consisting predominantly of Britons. The analysis explores themes related to social capital, friendship and community and discusses the relevance of leisure activities and practices in the creation on social capital. Drawing on qualitative data gathered through in depth interviews, group discussions and observation of meetings of members of the Calpe University of the Third Age branch. This chapter highlights the salience of friendship and the role of leisure pursuits in the creation of social capital among British retirees living in Calpe. Furthermore, it identifies, following Putnam (2000), the presence of two different kinds of social capital: bonding and bridging. As I argue here, members of the British retirement community in Calpe draw on both, although levels of bonding capital are significantly higher than those of bridging social capital.

This chapter builds up in recent research looking into the nature of IRM by providing an exploratory analysis of the social contacts and networks developed by these transnational communities of retirees. Using the concept of social capital as an umbrella to discuss issues related to friendship and community belonging and identity, the chapter explores the nature of the retirees' sociability once they relocate to Spain and examines the role of leisure in social capital generation. Each of these matters will be discussed using qualitative data derived from in depth interviews, group discussions and observation of meetings in the case study area of Calpe, Costa Blanca, Spain.

International retirement migration in Europe

In contemporary Europe, International Retirement Migration (IRM) is a phenomenon involving hundreds of thousands of people. Triggered by factors such as increased life expectancy, early retirement, rising incomes and affluence, and the accumulation of

tourism experiences, IRM has grown markedly since the 1960s (King et al. 2000), and for increasing numbers of elderly people, IRM is one of several 'post-retirement' options (Williams et al. 2000). The reasons behind this form of mobility in later life and the characteristics of those engaging in international retirement migration exemplify the nature of an emerging trend in contemporary societies, that is, lifestyle migration. As argued by Benson and O'Reilly (forthcoming), the term lifestyle migration encapsulates many forms of mobility experienced by relatively affluent individuals in search of a better quality of life (see also O'Reilly and Benson, this volume), with international retirement migration being one manifestation of this trend.

In the case of IRM, prior experiences of the migration destination, through previous tourist visits to the destination, ownership of a second home (Hall and Muller 2004) or visiting friends and relatives tourism (VFR) in part help to explain and rationalise migration. Migrant networks thus become part of the process of delineating the search spaces of other potential migrants through VFR tourism, with the existence of an established expatriate community reducing the barriers to later rounds of retirement migration (Williams et al. 2000, 35).

An emerging thread of research on IRM relates to the social contacts and network connections of the migrants in both the destination and origin areas (O'Reilly 2000; Casado-Díaz 2006; Gustafson 2008). These studies have examined the extent to which the retired migrants build social relationships with their neighbours and the host society, mostly through leisure-related practices, and how they retain close ties with their relatives and long-standing friends in their home countries through return visits and through visits to their homes from friends and relatives (Casado-Diaz et al. 2004; Huber and O'Reilly 2004; Gustafson 2008). Furthermore, it has been argued that leisure travel plays an important role in sustaining increasingly dispersed social networks and maintaining the social capital of these networks and of the individuals involved in them (Larsen 2008). Thus, it seems that particular forms of tourism, such as visiting friends and relatives tourism, can generate and sustain social capital through facilitating richer and more interdependent patterns of sociability (Larsen et al. 2006).

To date, the analysis of the experiences of IRM migrants in their destinations has been much more complete than the analysis of the links that migrants maintain with their original countries. This focus neglects internationally mobile nature of many International Retirement migrants, who are often peripatetic or seasonal (see Gustafson, this volume) and, out of both necessity and desire maintain personal ties with their place

of origin – they often maintain personal ties with their countries of origin. In order to study the migrants' lifestyles and experiences more fully it is necessary to consider their social activities and practices both locally and internationally – or 'transnationally'. The nature of the communities that migrants are active in – both within their home countries and receiving societies – remains under-researched. The intensity of such transnational practices and, by extension, the development of transnational communities are important aspects of IRM. How the migrants create new social contacts in the receiving areas while maintaining the ties with their home countries, the frequency of the social contacts, the mobilities involved in the maintenance of such ties and the nature of these post retirement, transnational communities are research areas that have just started to develop. It is with these considerations in mind that I present the following exploratory analysis of the social contacts and networks of retirement migrants living in Calpe.

Retirement migration, leisure and social capital

Leisure, featuring multiple activities and practices, is a feature of the lifestyles of those migrating from north to south at retirement age in Europe, often in concert with expatriate associations that provide social connections (O'Reilly 2000; Casado-Diaz 2006; Gustafson 2008; Oliver 2008). When it is considered that leisure scholars have stressed the role of leisure in the development of social capital and argued the need for qualitative analyses of the types of leisure activities and practices that might facilitate its development (Glover et al. 2005), it becomes pertinent to question how, for British retirees living in Spain, leisure activities give rise to the accumulation of social capital. As I demonstrate in this chapter, their leisure practices, exemplified by their participation in the University of the Third Age (U3A) and other organisations, allow them to come into contact with their compatriots and encourage the creation of social ties and networks. As I explain below, it is their engagement within these that gives rise to the accumulation of social capital.

The personal relationships that individuals accumulate when they interact with each other over time, both formally and informally, constitute the essence of social capital. Portes argues that social capital is usually understood as 'the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures' (1998, 6). The concept of social capital thus focuses on the positive consequences of sociability (Portes 1998).

According to Putnam (2000) different types of networks give rise to different forms of social capital. The distinction that Putnam (2000) establishes between bonding social capital and bridging social capital is particularly relevant to the study of the migrants' social networks. He argues that bonding types of social capital refer to close social connections (dense networks) between people and is characterised by strong bonds among family members or among members of the same ethnic group. Bonding social capital might also arise within a particular social group bound together by shared identities, interests and pace of residence (Healy 2003). This type of social capital, based on close family and friendship ties, is said to be beneficial to the self-interest of the individual or small groups, and generally good for "getting by" in life (Putnam 2000, 22). Bridging social capital describes the more distant connections between people and is characterised by weaker, but more cross-cutting ties, such as those with friends from different ethnic groups, friends of friends, etc. Bridging capital tends to be inclusive, encompassing people across different social groups and backgrounds, thus encouraging the formation of broader identities and collectivities and, ultimately, social cohesion (Parker and Song 2006, 180). This type of social capital is based on common interest rather than personal closeness or common identification. If bonding capital was good for "getting by", bridging types of social capital are supposed to be crucial help individuals to "get ahead" in life (Putnam 2000, 19). Nevertheless, this approach over-emphasises the importance of formal social connections, undermining the importance of informal social connections. Putnam's work has been criticised for presenting social capital as a 'cure-all for each of society's many ills (Field 2003, 38) and heralded as an 'unmixed blessing' (Pahl 2000, 153). As Li et al. (2005) argue, informal ties are a vital source of network resources and social trust, and therefore need to be acknowledged and valued. Social capital therefore has a dual function (Healy 2003). First, social ties, networks and mutual obligations are accumulated over time and used by its members to achieve social, personal or economic gain over time. Second, they are shared or group resources thus constituting a social resource.

However, it remains important to recognise that not all the social capital generated is beneficial to communities or, more specifically, intra or inter community relations. Parker and Song (2006, 180) have argued that bonding capital tends to reinforce group boundaries and identities; it facilitates reciprocity and solidarity among in-group members, often to the exclusion of others. Thus, one adverse effect of strong bonding social capital is that it may serve to exclude particular individuals or groups.

Likewise, it has been observed that social capital is not equally distributed among the members of a community. On a recent study of social capital in Europe Van Oorschot and Arts (2005) have found important differences on levels of social capital depending on class, age and gender. With regard to age and gender, the authors also found higher levels of social capital among older people and women. Gray's (2009) study of older people in the United Kingdom provides evidence of the significant role of informal social relationships, and measured by 'frequency of talking to neighbours and frequency of meeting people' (2009, 23), as sources of social support.

Recognising that social networks are facilitated by leisure reveals that participation in certain leisure activities can give rise to the accumulation of social capital. How much social capital exists will depend on the extent of one's social ties, the size of the social networks in which one is located, the volume of resources held by other members of those networks and network durability or persistence (Glover and Hemingway 2005). Bush and Baum (2001) suggest that leisure and cultural participation might provide individuals with a sense of belonging, support and social interactions, hence assisting them in forming community networks and bonds that are important for social cohesion. Leisure can thus result in strong social ties (Glover and Hemingway 2005; Rojek 2005), acting as a social lubricant for social capital generation (Glover et al. 2005).

One question that arises in relation to the communities that retired migrants form is the types of social capital generated. To simplify, on the one hand there is an expectation that bonding social capital will predominate. European older migrants have generally adopted a 'leisure lifestyle' and enjoyed the presence of a vibrant expatriate community particularly on the Mediterranean coast and the islands. For many older residents social life takes place within leisure-based social networks and communities organised according to national origin, and with few contacts with local Spanish inhabitants (O´Reilly 2000, Casado-Diaz et al. 2004, Gustafson 2008). Hence bonding social capital would seem to be apparent.

On the other hand, however, one might equally expect bridging social capital to be generated. Warde et al. (2005), in their recent analysis of the role that engagement in informal recreational activities play in social capital formation, have noted that informal social contacts may be especially important in generating 'bridging' and 'boundary-spanning' types of social capital. According to these authors social capital deriving from voluntary association membership facilitates contact with people unlike oneself, thereby

promoting social integration (Warde et al. 2005, 404). Thus the networks of people involved in informal recreational practices seem to be less socially uniform than those of associations and therefore more promising ground for the building of bridging capital (Warde et al. 2005).

The salience of friendship in the generation of social capital has been much discussed in the literature (Pahl 2000; Pahl and Spencer 2004) and has become a key element in recent sociological debates on individualisation and the transformation of intimacy (Pahl and Pevalin 2005, 433). For Pahl (2000, 1) friendship may be seen as 'an increasingly important form of social glue in contemporary societies'. He argues that there is a growing centrality of personal communities as opposed to geographical communities or work-based communities, communities that might change as the individual moves along the life-course (Pahl 2000). The term social capital can thus be seen as an umbrella for explaining the nature of personal communities, social networks and other forms and styles of social connectedness in contemporary societies (Pahl 2000). Friendships might adopt many different forms and the strength of these informal ties will depend on the level of relationship commitment attached to them (Pahl and Spencer 2004) The strength of these non-kin friendships, or 'weak' ties, as termed by Granovetter (1973), reflects a mutual liking, affection, common interests and values and are an important resource for both the individual and the community. As argued by Granovetter, 'the strength of a tie is a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie' (1973, 1361).

As I have demonstrated in this section, participation in leisure activities facilitates the creation and maintenance of new social ties and networks. If social capital originates within social networks, between members of a community or group, then the new social networks built by my respondents can give rise to the accumulation of social capital. I therefore investigate below what the migrants' accounts reveal about social capital, and in what ways this is useful to them in their new surroundings.

Data and methods
The data in this chapter is based on a case study of the Calpe area, on the Costa Blanca, Spain. Calpe is a coastal town in the north of the Costa Blanca with considerable presence of British retirees, alongside migrants from other countries – notably Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavian countries. Calpe and its environs are

considered to be among the more wealthy areas along the Costa Blanca. Property prices are high and most of its local economic activity revolves around the tourism industry. From that point of view, Calpe shares many characteristics with other established tourist resorts along the Mediterranean coast which have also experienced the development of IRM flows over the last two decades.

Access to respondents was gained through an organisation called the University of the Third Age (U3A). U3A is a "self-help organization for people no longer in full time employment providing educational, creative and leisure opportunities in a friendly environment" (U3A website). This organisation has local branches all over the UK and abroad, which are charities in their own right and are run entirely by volunteers. The ethos of U3As is to share the expertise of their own members. They are 'learning cooperatives which draw upon the knowledge, experience and skills of their own members to organise and provide interest groups in accordance with the wishes of the membership' (U3A web). Activities vary, but examples of groups that are common in U3As on the Costa Blanca include Spanish language groups, computing groups, walking groups, literature and history groups, and travel groups.

U3A was directly targeted in this research as it was expected that it would yield considerable data on social capital and leisure. It is not claimed that members of U3A are representative of the broader community of retired migrants – many IRM migrants are not members of U3A. Nevertheless, the membership is large with some local branches, such as the Jávea and Denia branches, exceeding 650 members each and with waiting lists of more than 200 people. There are more than 3,000 U3A members, based on five local branches on the Costa Blanca area. Calpe U3A has 500 members who are, for the most part, British, and, as well as Calpe, it also covers two other smaller municipalities, Benissa and Moraira; in these three municipalities 60% of the residents are of foreign nationality, mostly British (INE 2007).

Calpe U3A meets once a month through the year, though it breaks during the summer months as many members return to the UK at that time. A total of 44 groups were active at the time of the research. Many were based around sports (e.g. tennis, snooker) some were focused on arts and hobbies (e.g. painting, choir, mosaics) and also on more "casual" leisure (e.g. dining at home). Others were based on education, such as local history, or Spanish language. The idea is that members form groups around matters of interest to them, and group members share their expertise in a particular area,

rather than looking to be 'taught' by non-group members. This therefore encourages the creation of social ties and networks.

U3As are one of a number of associations that retired migrant might choose to belong to, and in this sense they provide a good example of the lifestyle of IRM migrants. However, it is important to note that the majority of those involved in this organisation seem to share socioeconomic characteristics and educational backgrounds and, generally speaking, are very middle class. From this point of view, this study concentrates on the group of retired immigrants who have a full social life in their place of residence. This, however, is not common to other groups of older Europeans living abroad with fewer resources who might find themselves excluded or marginalised from the local social life (O´Reilly 2007). Thus, the research findings need to be considered bearing in mind the fact that those interviewed through the U3A meetings and organised activities joined this organisation with the clear purpose of widening up their circle of social contacts once they moved to Spain. From this point of view, U3A members are prone to report high levels of sociability compared to others who might not belong to similar leisure-based groups or associations.

The fieldwork consisted of observation of several meetings of the Calpe U3A group and other local U3A branches, a questionnaire (plus an online version available on the websites of several local U3As), group discussions and interviews with key members of this organisation from September 2007 to July 2008. This chapter reports some of the findings derived from the qualitative data, mostly from the in depth interviews and informal discussions with members of the Calpe U3A. 12 in depth interviews (mostly with women) and several informal group discussions were conducted at weekly activity-group meetings organised through the U3A.

Leisure, friendship and community: social capital in the sun

The interviews with members of the Calpe U3A support the view that leisure can facilitate the creation of social capital, as argued in the literature (Glover and Hemingway 2005; Glover et al. 2005; Warde et al. 2005). Those interviewed agreed that their involvement in leisure activities, primarily through the U3A Calpe, have enabled them to create new relationships with other members of their community and, gradually, form their own personal informal networks of friends and acquaintances. As one respondent reported,

> When we first arrived in here [in Calpe] we didn't know anyone so we looked in the local (English) papers for things to do. We saw the U3A advert and we decided to give it a go. Soon we had meet many people and made some friends with whom we started to socialise outside the group's activities. (Lee, 65)[i]

From this point of view, the U3A represents a starting point for many of the retirees who arrive at the case study area without any personal contacts. Several interviewees said that U3A played a central role in building up their new social networks when they moved to this area. As one interviewee explained,

> Leisure is extremely important, when you retire; it is the leisure activities that keep us active, the leisure activities that introduce us to new people all the time so we are sort of gaining socially as well as through the activities that we do. (Jackie, 65)

Another respondent pointed out the role of their local U3A branch in helping those who have only just arrived to build up new relationships,

> When you first come here you suddenly realise you don't know a soul, you come to this foreign country and where do you get to know people? it is quite scary actually, I mean, you leave your family, friends you built over the years... so I think a lot of people see the U3A as a way of making social contacts, getting new friends. (Diane, 60)

Social capital, however, requires constant investment over time and for the retirees that mean active participation and strong commitment to the different activity-based groups and volunteer organisations they belong to. As one woman explained,

> You need to make a concerted effort of going there every week to build up relationships because you have to, you can be very alone and isolated here. You have to actively seek this, make the effort to make friends, make the contacts that you might need later on. (Lisa, 66)

With regard to the nature of the British community in Calpe, the perception of people interviewed for this project in the main is that the British people living in Calpe are middle class, and that U3A is a middle class pursuit. On this point, one interviewee said,

> There are important differences between those living in the North of Alicante (Denia, Javea, Altea) and those living in the South (Torrevieja, Orijuela etc). In the south you see people who are just replicating their routines back in the UK, like their English pubs, karaokes, bingo nights. They basically want to do the same as they used to do back at home, but in nice weather. In the north, people seem more interested in doing different things, in self-actualisation through participation in activity based classes, learning Spanish, getting involved in groups. I would say there is a clear class distinction between the north and the south, with the north being very middle class and the south being typically working class. (Amanda, 68)

One of the common themes in all interviews was the desire of the retirees to distinguish themselves for those ´other´ British who moved to the south of the province and are ´not like them´ at all (see also Benson, this volume; Oliver and O'Reilly forthcoming). General comments pointed out at the differences in terms of social class among those living in the north of the Costa Blanca and those settled in the south. Based on property prices and environment quality there is a clear distinction between those who can afford the real estate prices of places such as Calpe, Jávea and Moraira and those who can only buy smaller and cheaper properties in resorts such as Torrevieja and Orihuela Costa (Gibler et al. 2008). On this point one of the retirees said,

> Those of us living here (in the Calpe area) are very different to those who moved to places in the south of Alicante, particularly Torrevieja. We all come from the same background…I guess we are all very middle class compared to those living in the south, who are, I guess, very working class. (Lucy, 68)

Such comments were fairly typical. The general impression given by interviewees was one where they see and portray themselves as middle class people in a middle class area following middle class pursuits. The social networks that the respondents move in are socially homogenous – generally middle class British people – and thus can be considered as promoting bonding social capital. One resident commented 'most of our friends are like us, we have many things in common. I guess we are all middle class'. However, on the topic of social class and heterogeneity of friendships, one respondent noted,

> I think back in England the social level is far more defined … so you are friends with people from the same sort of group, with the people you are on the same sort of level at work … whereas here, you might end up being friends with people very different to yourself, both ways, people on a higher position or people in a lower position, because you wouldn't know before you were friends with them … I think it is a great social leveller in here. (Claire, 58)

This perception of a ´classless´ community was also mentioned by many members of the U3A Calpe but, among a very middle class group such as this one, it seemed particularly relevant to the less well-off. Those with a middle-upper class status noted that, although they had many friends ´from all walks of life´ (see also Oliver 2008), as one retiree put it, their ´hardcore´ circle of friends was very ´alike´, very homogeneous.

The presence of bridging forms of social capital was also explored in the interviews with members of the British community and members of the U3A Calpe.

The evidence seem to suggest that, while there are some links with other nationalities, and with the host community, the social networks that these respondents move in are predominantly British and predominantly homogeneous. One exception to this was the collaboration between the U3A Calpe Choir, formed mostly by British nationals, and the local Spanish Choir on a recent concert. Similarly, although most of the volunteering activities organised by the U3A are carried out by British members, the beneficiaries of many of the fund-raising events organised by them are organisations with a broader base, or mainly Spanish, such as the local Red Cross or the local elderly home. Overall, very limited bridging forms of social capital were found. This finding is not surprising – U3A is for English-speaking people, but members do exist outside of U3A. Nevertheless, the links that people tend to report with non-British people are more tenuous. Fairly typical was the experience of one resident who commented:

> I would say we socialise mainly with other British people; it is not that we do not want to meet Spanish people but we find it very difficult because our lack of Spanish. But we do have Spanish friends, some neighbours we say hello and so and we do have a very good relationship with them. (David, 65)

Speaking of their relationships with members of other migrant groups, one other resident said,

> We do have some good non-British friends, some of our neighbours are Belgium or German and we meet up some times for dinners or coffees. We would like to know more non-British people but the truth is that most of our friends are British. (Jarvis, 60)

This lack of contact with other local groups was mostly associated to the language barrier. All of those interviewed noted their disappointment for their lack of knowledge of Spanish and pointed out how this lack of language skills hindered the possibility of friendships with Spanish nationals, most to their regret. As one retiree described,

> I am learning Spanish and use it everyday but you don't stand a chance, even in shops I use my Spanish whenever I can but it is very frustrating because they answer me in English and I can not practice my Spanish. So we end up having a conversation where I am talking in Spanish and they are talking to me in English! (Tom, 60)

Another aspect related to patterns of sociability that was reported by interviewees was a greater number of friends in Calpe compared to what they had had than their place of origin. One of the interviewees said 'I have more and better friends in here than I ever had back in the UK'. Another said 'I think that there is a very tight community here, in Calpe, and we look after each other; there are so many people I could turn to if I needed anything. I feel at home' (Huber and O'Reilly 2004; Oliver 2008).

The number and strength of friendships in Spain was a recurrent theme among those interviewed. Many retirees reported having more and closer friendships than they ever had back in England, friends who, as one respondent put it, ´we trust implicitly and we know they only have our best interest at heart, the same that we would anything to help them´. Most of the interviewees pointed out that part of the excitement of moving to Spain was that ´element of challenge´, of starting something new. ´Making a fresh start´ or ´staring a new chapter in your life´ were recurrent comments (cf. Benson and O'Reilly, forthcoming; O'Reilly and Benson, this volume) as was the fact that many retirees were in their second or third marriages. Another respondent insisted on the different nature of friendship in their new places of residence when compared to England,

> In England most of our friends were work-related and although they were friends sometimes you felt you couldn't totally relax because you had your standing within the community to think about. Whereas as you get older and you retire there is freedom, it doesn't matter anymore, you don't have to try and impress people, you can relax, you can be yourself and enjoy other people. (Diane, 60)

This idea of making a fresh start, perhaps following the beginning of a new relationship, a divorce or the children leaving home, was reported as one of the attractions of moving away from home.

> Here you have the opportunity to meet people and be yourself, you are not the mother of anyone or the wife of anyone, you are just yourself. I enjoy not having any pressure from anyone, being myself, and I only socialising with people I really like. (Trisha, 55)

The findings also fit the theoretical assumptions underpinning Pahl and Spencer's work (2004, 2006) on the process of suffusion between familial and non-familial relationships by which friends and family may play similar roles. Most retirees pointed out the salience of their newly established friendships in Spain and how these new social relationships substituted to a certain extent familial ties and friendships back in England. The shift towards 'chosen relationships', as argued by Pahl and Spencer's (2004, 2006), was also evidenced in the respondents' interviews. This element of 'personal choice' in the sphere of friendships was highly valued by those interviewed as demonstrated in the following quotations.

> (In Spain) you chose your friends, people you like, have things in common. What is nice too, is because we all left our previous lives behind there is jealousy, no competition, it is a clean board, and we all come and say hello, I am so and so, and we make our friends from there. (Jackie, 65)

> Here I have far more friends, because you are on the same boat, whether it is because you are in the same mindset to make the effort to come out here, and probably makes you more a community because you know you might need to call on somebody for help and they might need to call on you for help, and that is the way it goes; you are in a different country, with a different language … you need to rely on your friends. (Claire, 58)

There seems to be a common feeling of reciprocity and solidarity among those interviewed where friendship nearly takes the place of family and where social relationships become the most important social resource to ´get by´ in their new lives in Spain. This ongoing process of suffusion between kin and non-kin relationships was neatly summarised by one respondent.

> I have more friends now than I ever had and they are closer, much closer; in a way, they even take the place of your family, become a sort of substitute of your own family, and because we don't have families here and they don't occupy so much of our time, it seems we have more time for each other […] as far as I am concerned friends are very important, just like family. (Theresa, 52)

Many of the opinions expressed in the interviews point to two findings. The first is that membership of the U3A – a leisure pursuit – has led to the creation of social networks, that in turn have generated social capital between group members. The second finding is that the main form of social capital that appears to be generated is bonding social capital. The English speaking community in Calpe is a community bonded by nationality, language, class, and interests, succinctly summarised in the words of one female respondents in the following manner:

> What unite us, really, is that it is not easy living in a different country where you are not that good at the language; we are all away from home, we are all away from our families, and I think this gives us a very strong feeling of identity within the community. (Diane, 60)

It is apparent that their newly formed interpersonal ties provide them with the necessary social support, sense of belonging and social identity to be able to face this new stage of their life-course. Within this community, the U3A builds on this sense of common identity. Members define themselves as middle class, educated, and active, and seek out like-minded people, or, as one respondent put it, 'people like us'.

Hence group members bond with each other, rather than with other individuals or social groups. Often, respondents volunteer that they do have friends from other nationalities – either from Spain or other European countries – but when pressed these

often turn out to acquaintances with whom the respondent has little contact. Also, the U3A is English-speaking, and it is not unheard of to encounter other native English speakers (Americans, South Africans) within the U3A network, or others for whom English is a second language. Overwhelmingly though, these IRM migrants are bonding within their own fellow nationals, not with the wider local community.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked into one specific dimension of social capital, that is social networks and, more specifically, formal and informal sociability, and explored the presence of two different types of social capital, bonding and bridging, among members of the retired British community in the Costa Blanca. The results show that both formal and informal social networks provide emotional as well as instrumental support and constitute a vital source of informal help for retired migrants. Also, leisure appears to facilitate both informal and formal relationships among the members of the British community enabling its members to create new stocks of social capital away from their homes. However, it is mostly through their informal ties, their friendships, that the retirees achieve a sense of community, of belonging and identity away from their home country. Likewise, the social capital generated through their interpersonal ties, mainly with other members of the British community, provides them with the necessary social resources, in the form of both emotional and instrumental support, to achieve the better lifestyle that they aim to achieve with their move to Spain.

In terms of types of social capital, the findings show high levels of bonding social capital and limited levels of bridging social capital among those interviewed. The qualitative data also evidence a blurring of the boundaries between these two types of social capital. Although all the interviewees reported having very heterogeneous friendships, when the nature of these friendships was further discussed it transpired that most friends had many shared interests and common backgrounds and, generally, were very ´alike´.

From the retirees' point of view, personal background did not seem to count as much as place location. They felt that their similar circumstances (being foreigners in a country with a different language and no family support) and their shared interests created a strong feeling of community belonging and contributed to high levels of intra-community reciprocity. As suggested in previous research, bonding types of social capital do seem to reinforce group identities and facilitate reciprocity and solidarity

among ingroup members (Parker and Song 2006). As one retiree put it, '(in Spain) we make better and closer friends very quickly because of the shared culture, the language. We are outsiders and we stick together'.

The findings suggest that social capital arises mainly through leisure participation and social engagement among members of the British community in the Calpe area. Their newly formed networks of relationships provide the retirees with an informal communal system of self-help (through volunteering) and reciprocity and give them a strong sense of community. Furthermore, the network of interpersonal relations developed, mostly, through leisure-related pursuits and activities, enables them to access emotional as well as practical support, a scarce resource for those who have moved to a different country and can no longer rely on the support of family and long-time friends. These findings thus support the increasing role of informal social connections and the role of leisure in social capital generation.

From this point of view, friendships appear to substitute, to a great extent, familial ties left behind and, for most respondents, the friendships formed in their new places of residence were stronger and closer than those back in their country of origin. Friendship relationships represented for the retirees their most important social resource. For them, as for Pahl (2000), friendships did form the social glue of their new life in Spain. Also, there was a greater sense of ´free choice´ among those interviewed with regard to their new social relationships when compared to their previous lives.

Overall, those retirees interviewed report a strong feeling of community inclusion or belonging achieved. In the words of one respondent,

> We feel at home within the British community, we are a tight community; overall, I think we are all very satisfied with our lives. I think that if I haven't moved I would have missed out a lot and I like to think that this will be my home until I die. (Male, 65)

Notes

[i] All names appearing in the text are pseudonyms.

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