

Exploring the geographies of lifestyle mobility: current and future fields of enquiry

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Chapter Abstract

Lifestyle Migration has become a consolidated field of research in tourism geographies, incorporating (International) Retirement Migration, counterurbanization, second-home ownership, and other forms of lifestyle-oriented migration. Focusing on the phenomenon of international retirement migration, this chapter seeks to assess the state of this field of research, evaluating the dominant methodological and theoretical perspectives and understandings of later life migration in different destinations. The chapter concludes with some reflections regarding future areas of research noting the importance of further research examining the migrants' transnational lifestyles and the impacts of such population movements in both the destination and origin areas.

1. The emergence of lifestyle migration

It has been argued that tourism constitutes a form of leisure-oriented mobility and, as such, it is both shaped and contributes to the shaping of contemporary practices of consumption, production and lifestyle (see Hall et al. 2004). Tourism has significantly influenced the mapping of potential destinations for different forms of leisure-oriented mobility, such as second home ownership, amenity-seeking seasonal migration or international retirement migration and has also contributed to the intensification and diversification of these forms of contemporary mobility in recent decades.

An emerging thread of research on contemporary mobilities relates to lifestyle migration and the search for a better quality of life¹. Lifestyle migrants are often characterized as relative affluent and geographically mobile individuals who relocate, on a seasonal or permanent basis, to relatively less affluent areas in search of a better lifestyle (see Benson and O'Reilly, 2009a). Lifestyle migration can be conceptually framed within the new mobility paradigm (Sheller and Urry, 2006). It encapsulates and discusses the implications and varied manifestations of leisure-oriented mobility in contemporary societies and research on this field has explored the lives and lifestyle choices of the migrants by focusing on the context and trajectories, the nexus between tourism and seasonal and/or permanent migration, the motivations and determinants of lifestyle migration, the migrants' experiences and everyday lives and the implications for host and home communities. It also explores the importance of issues of gender, age, place, identity, class, nation and community among these amenity-seeking migrants. Benson and O'Reilly (2009a, p.621) define lifestyle migration as the migration of 'relatively affluent individuals, moving either part-time or full-time, permanently or temporarily, to places which, for various reasons, signify for the migrants something loosely defined as quality of life'. As argued by Benson and O'Reilly (2009a), lifestyle migration becomes the outcome of the reflexive assessment of opportunities to embark in a different way of life and, as such, is constrained by the habitus of the individual.

This field of research has become a consolidated area of research in tourism geographies. The geographies of lifestyle migration incorporate different forms of mobility such as international retirement migration, second-home ownership and residential tourism as well as other forms of lifestyle oriented migration, such as mobile professionals (Scott, 2006; Stone and Stubbs, 2007; Fetcher, 2007; Favel, 2008; Wash, 2009; Fetcher and Walsh, 2010), which are not discussed here.

This chapter focuses on the growing body of literature on the subject of international retirement migration and attempts to address the main topics of research among this field as well as to provide some reflections regarding future directions for research.

2. The geographies of tourism and migration

Tourism has greatly influenced the development and extension of the many manifestations of lifestyle migration, including international retirement migration. Previous tourist visits to the destinations were reported as the main prior connection to the area in most studies on international retirement migration (Casado-Diaz et al. 2004), as was the purchase of second homes as a stepping stone towards permanent or seasonal retirement migration (Muller, 2002; Williams et al. 2000; Hall and Muller, 2004). Mass tourism developments in southern Europe provided the necessary infrastructure in terms of services and amenities that made the areas attractive to future migrants, while friends and relatives who were already living in the destination influenced eventual decisions to migrate to the area on a seasonal or permanent basis (Rodriguez, 2001; Gustafson, 2002; Williams et al. 2000). Similarly, this consumption-led mobility has generated important reciprocal flows of visiting friends and relatives exemplifying the reinforcing links between tourism and migration in later life (Williams and Hall, 2002).

In the majority of cases, before an elderly couple decides to migrate to another country, they have usually spent time in the favoured area as tourists or workers, and to some extent have become acquainted with the lifestyle, making it easier to integrate when they decide to settle on a more permanent basis (Williams et al. 2000). Thus the processes of international mass tourism and second home developments has strongly influenced the flows of international retirees within Europe, emphasising the importance of these conditioning pathways (Casado-Diaz, 2001; Rodriguez, 2001; Williams and Hall, 2002; Williams et al. 2000; Muller, 2002). Similarly, some authors have argued that migrant networks become part of the process of defining the search spaces of other potential migrants through visiting friends and relatives tourism, while the existence of an established expatriate community reduces the barriers to later rounds of retirement migration (Williams et al. 2000, p. 35). Indeed, touring in the adopting country and abroad, and return visits to the country of origin are a strong feature of the lifestyles of mostly younger retirees, while transportation and communication developments enable them to actively maintain the social ties back in their countries of origin through their own visits and by making the visits from friends and relatives also possible.

However, it is also argued that the circulation between multiple homes and more seasonally-based amenity seeking international moves might become an alternative to permanent migration (Gustafson, 2001; Flognfeldt, 2002; Williams and Hall, 2002). Retired migrants become in this way a truly 'transnational' community (O'Reilly, 2000; Gustafson, 2001 and 2008; Bozic, 2006; Casado-Diaz, 2009).

As well as the individual motivations, a series of historical developments and material conditions have enabled growing numbers of lifestyle migrants to participate in these forms of contemporary mobility. Several determinants explain the rise of international retirement migration in Europe: the increase in life expectancy, rising incomes and affluence, the innovations in transportation and communications, the initial relatively lower cost of living and properties in southern Mediterranean countries and the familiarity of travelling, working and owning a second home abroad (Williams et al. 2000). This historical context opened up the 'mental maps' of many early retirees who saw the potential of a better lifestyle by moving abroad (Williams et al. 2000).

3. International retirement migration in Europe

Within Europe, amenity movements have typically originated in northern and central countries (i.e. United Kingdom, Germany, Scandinavian countries), while southern countries, as well as inland France and Italy, have been the main destinations (i.e. Spain, Portugal, Greece, Malta). Although the number of those who choose to migrate internationally once they reach retirement age is not as high as other forms of mobility, today's older people have above-average opportunities for international travel. They have the resources, are not restricted by employment obligations, and the majority have neither dependent children nor parents in need of daily personal care. These amenity-led migrants are primarily motivated by the desire to engage in a more satisfying way of life and in order to do so they search for new spaces that will provide them with more opportunities to enjoy their post-retirement lives. Typically, these migrants are mostly couples in their fifties and sixties with no dependants who sold their home in their country of origin to buy another property in a southern European region and who have had previous experiences of working or living abroad. The purchasing of foreign properties can be then seen as a conscious element of a financial strategy for maximising material wellbeing in late life (Casado-Diaz et al. 2004).

Many surveys analysing the attitudes, experiences and decision making amongst international retirement migrants to Southern Europe suggest that for most retirees the Mediterranean climate was the main pull factor explaining their decision to relocate elsewhere (Casado-Diaz et al. 2004). A warmer and milder climate, particularly during the winter months, and the general health-related benefits associated with it, allows them to carry out a more active lifestyle and to pursue a healthier pace of life. Equally important for many older migrants were the considerable financial advantages associated with moving to southern Europe, principally the relatively lower cost of living and housing (King et al. 2000). Similar results have been reported for other non-European retirement destinations (Stimson and Minnery, 1998; Bell and Ward, 2002; Longino and Warnes, 2004; Dixon et al. 2006). The high levels of satisfaction with the move described in most surveys suggest a general sense of achievement/success regarding their decision to migrate to a warmer region in their later life in search of a better life (Casado-Diaz et al. 2004). European older migrants have generally adopted a 'leisure lifestyle' and enjoyed the presence of a vibrant expatriate community particularly in the Mediterranean coast and islands. For many older residents social life takes place within social networks and communities organized according to national origin and with few contacts with local Spanish inhabitants (O'Reilly, 2000; Huber and O'Reilly, 2004; Casado-Diaz et al. 2004; Casado, 2006). Although retirees moving from northern to southern Europe share many similarities it has become evident that the forms and consequences of international retirement migration are uneven and also contingent on place and nationality. The heterogeneity of IRM and the reported differences between destinations and between nationalities (Casado-Diaz, 2006) highlights the need for more in depth research on the field.

4. Researching international retirement migration: methodological and conceptual reflections

Studies of later-life migration have had a long tradition in the United States examining the flows of 'snowbirds' from the northern states and from Canada towards US sunbelt destinations (for reviews see Serow, 2001; Walters, 2002; Longino and Bradley, 2003). Most US-based research on this topic has adopted a nationally-based macro approach to analyze the distribution patterns, determinants and consequences of this type of amenity-led mobility in later life. Only recently have studies on international retirement migration turned their attention to the migration of American retirees towards non-USA destinations such as Panama, Mexico and Costa Rica (see, for example, Banks, 2004; Otero, 1997; Dixon et al. 2006; Truly, 2002; Sunil et al. 2007; McWatters, 2008; Lizarraga, 2010).

Most of these studies are based on the authors' own surveys and interviews at the destinations as opposed to the macro level analysis used in most US interstate migration research. Similar trends have been studied in the Gold Coast in Australia where research has shown the causal relationships between tourism and seasonal and permanent migration and the similarities with other international retirement destinations (Stimson and Minnery, 1998; Bell and Ward, 1998 and 2000; Onyx and Leonard, 2005). Elsewhere, international retirement migration is becoming an option for growing numbers of retirees, such is the case of Japanese retiring to southeast Asia, mainly to Malaysia (Toyota, 2006; Ono, 2008), or Northern Europeans settling in the southern coast of the Turkish Mediterranean (Sudas and Mutluer, 2006; Balkir and Kirkulak, 2009; Nudrali and O'Reilly, 2009), in Croatia (Bozic, 2006), in the Romanian countryside (Nagy, 2006) and in Northern Africa (Bousta, 2006).

International retirement migration in Europe developed mostly during the 1980s, with growing numbers of northern European retirees moving seasonally or permanently to amenity areas located in the Mediterranean basin, predominantly to the Spanish and Portuguese costas. During the 1990s international retirement migration became a fruitful field of research with a number of studies exploring the decision-making process behind retirement migration, patterns of mobility, characteristics of the migrants, living conditions, their motivations and expectations, their social contacts and some of their social and economic consequences at the destination. Research in this decade had a strong geographical focus with a proliferation of case studies looking at the life experiences of national groups in particular destinations and limited comparative research on the characteristics of national groups (Casado-Diaz, 2006).

Many of the early studies were of small settlements and local concentrations of national retirees (e.g. Myklebost, 1989; Mullan, 1992; O'Reilly, 1995; Betty, 1997), but in the late 1990s and early 2000s a series of large systematic surveys turned their attention to the living conditions, social contacts, integration and wellbeing of the migrants (Casado-Diaz et al. 2004). This was mostly motivated by the scarcity of accurate official records regarding the volume of international retirement migration (Williams et al. 2000; Casado-Diaz and Rodriguez, 2002). Most studies focused on the volume and geographical distribution of the flows of older migrants and considered the motivational factors explaining the decision-making process involved in this phenomenon (Casado-Diaz et al. 2004). This type of research has been, with some exceptions (O'Reilly, 1995, 2000), predominantly quantitative in

nature (Casado-Diaz and Rodriguez, 2002; Rodriguez et al. 2005) and lacked an in-depth approach to some of the most relevant issues related to this type of amenity-led mobility in later life. Moreover, as noted by Warnes and Williams (2006, p.1259), the nature of these initial studies was considerably influenced by the demands of data availability, research funding and logistical feasibility.

In the 2000s attention continued to focus on the motivations and the post-migration lifestyles and experiences of the migrants, producing a vibrant collection of research studies (see Rodriguez, Casado-Diaz and Huber, 2005 and the special issues of *Ageing and Society*, 2004, and the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2006, on Older Migrants in Europe), but it has also turned onto more needed conceptual discussions around the definition of this form of mobility and the development of research frameworks to analyse it. Benson and O'Reilly (2009a) have led this field of enquiry with their attempts to conceptualise lifestyle migration, while other recent studies have provided insights into the aspirations, everyday lives, social networks, community-building and identity negotiation (Gustafson, 2001, 2008; Casado-Diaz, 2009; Oliver, 2008; Benson, 2010), the environmental impacts and planning implications for retirement destinations (Zasada et al. 2010), as well as issues of health care, welfare entitlement and citizenship among these populations (Ackers and Dwyer, 2002 and 2004; Dwyer and Papadimitriou, 2006; La Parra and Mateo, 2008).

Many studies have adopted a national case-study based perspective on the analysis of the migrants' lifestyles producing detailed analyses of the migrants' experiences in the receiving societies. However, this approach pays less attention to the transnational practices and personal ties with the sending countries. In order to study the migrants' lifestyles and experiences it is necessary to consider their activities and practices both locally and internationally. While the rapid development of communication and transportation technologies has allowed migrants to engage in 'transnational lifestyles', they have also sustained reciprocal links with their home countries (King et al. 1998; Gustafson, 2001; Bozic, 2006; Casado-Diaz, 2009). As argued by Warnes (2009, p.359), 'the ease and low cost of international travel is allowing many older people to exploit, maintain and continue to develop residential opportunities, social networks and welfare entitlements in more than one country'. This evidences the need to move from the local and national perspectives to a transnational approach that considers both sending and receiving societies in the analysis of the lived experiences of international retired migrants (Casado-Diaz, 2008).

Another emerging thread of research on the field of lifestyle migration is the analysis of the interpersonal relationships and network connections of the migrants in both the destination and origin areas. Researchers are now focusing their attention on the study of the relationships formed between the retirees and their neighbours and host societies, and the way in which they are also able to 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 (Huber and O'Reilly, 2004; Casado-Díaz, 2009; Gustafson, 2008).

5. Future directions for research on international retirement migration

Future research on the field of lifestyle migration and, particularly, on international retirement migration, will be characterized by a renewed interest in the geographical distribution and diversification and the transnational practices of these mobile populations. As Warnes and Williams (2006, p.1274) put it,

'with each decade and among successive cohorts of older people, there will not only be new destinations and flows, but we must expect the forms and expressions of retirement preferences and lives to change'.

The changing historical conditions in both places of origin and destination, the diversification of international tourism markets as well as the changing nature and pre-retirement lifestyles of the new flows of immigrants will determine the geographical distribution of future later-life migration flows. In this sense, the role of the current global recession in the potential decline of established retirement destinations and the emergence of new markets for international retirement migrants will become central for the analysis of future trends in this field, particularly its impacts on the mobility patterns and residential strategies of those involved in this form of lifestyle migration. Moreover, the effects of the global financial crisis on the geographical re-distribution of elderly lifestyle migrants are yet to be assessed since most published research predated the financial crisis. Likewise, the implications of the globalization of tourism and second home developments for future patterns of international retirement migration, the growth of visiting friends and relatives tourism linked to international retirement communities and its role in the intensification/reinforcement/consolidation? of chain migration to already well established retirement destinations are research topics that remain still unexplored in tourism geography. In the European context, rising prices and costs in the context of a strong Euro

together with a growing competition from amenity regions located in South East Europe, might prelude a rapid growth of the already existing international communities in these regions (Williams, 2008, p.89).

6. Conclusions

These are only but a few research areas to be further explored, therefore, there is a rich research agenda waiting to be developed by tourism geographers with respect to the many forms and consequences of contemporary lifestyle migration. There is an increased recognition of the need for a more theoretical informed understanding of lifestyle migration (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009a, 2009b) and greater considerations of the methodological approaches that drive this type of research, such as the need for more in-depth multi sited and multi disciplinary studies exploring the transnational practices and interpersonal relationships of these lifestyle migrants.

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ⁱ For a directory of researchers working in this field and published and ongoing research go to the Lifestyle Migration Hub link at http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ss/lmhub/lmhub_home.html.