The Rural Idyll, Residential Tourism, and the Spirit of Lifestyle Migration

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Introduction: Lifestyle Migrants

Contemporary migrations are much more likely to be from so-called developing countries to economically more developed countries than the other way around. Nevertheless, geographical mobility is becoming increasingly complex and a global perspective on migration has to take account of the movement of elite and affluent migrants as well as poorer ones. This is especially important given the impact such affluent moves can have on places and people at both ends of the chain.

This paper identifies a trend we label *lifestyle migration*. Lifestyle migrants are relatively affluent individuals, moving, en masse, either part or full time, permanently or temporarily, to countries where the cost of living and/or the price of property is cheaper; places which, for various reasons, signify something loosely defined as quality of life. Lifestyle migration thus includes such studied moves as:

- Northern Europeans moving to Spain, including British, Germans, Finnish, Norwegians, Swiss, Swedish, and Scandinavians;
- North European retirement migrants to Malta, Italy, Portugal, Greece and Turkey;
- European and US second home owners in Croatia, especially Istria and Dubrovnik;
- British moving to France;
- Dutch in France;
- Europeans in Romania;
- North Americans migrating to Mexico;
- Europeans to Marrakech; and
- Québécois to Florida

(see references below)

The inadequacy of prior conceptualisations

Since the phenomenon is not covered by standard migration typologies in each project listed above researchers have attempted to link their studies to wider phenomena using umbrella concepts such as: retirement, elderly or later life migration; second-home ownership; Intra-European migration; North-South migration; seasonal migration and temporary migration. None of these conceptualisations, however, is fully inclusive or mutually exclusive. None grasps the complexity of the phenomenon or unites its various elements. On the other hand, the research has shown that in each case a key motivation for the migration has been the search for something intangible, encapsulated in the phrase 'quality of life'. For this reason I am using the label Lifestyle Migration. I will now explore each of these prior conceptualisations in turn, as a step on the way to defining and delimiting a phenomenon.

Retirement/later-life migration

Many of the migration trends listed above involve predominantly retired and/or later-life migrants. In many cases those moving are older, on average, than the average age of the sending and receiving populations and, at least initially, it was possible to

conceptualise these trends in terms of retirement migration. However, the 'retirement' label is misleading because, as Williams and Hall (2002) note, many of those officially retired are actually working part-time or engaging in occasional informal labour activities. And the 'later life' label is inadequate because many are what we might call early retired or younger economically inactive. We must also remember that those who set out to study retirement migration, elderly migration, or later life migration will locate retired and older respondents to include in their samples and so will exclude younger people. Average ages of samples then become somewhat meaningless (see, for example, Casado-Díaz et al. 2004). Furthermore, several researchers have noted the growing tendency for younger and working people to migrate within these same trends. Retirement and later-life signify increased leisure time, freedom from ties and commitments, and perhaps increased expendable wealth. These enable the search for a new and different way of life, which is the key, common, variable for lifestyle migrants.

Second homes

Some academics, such as Antonio Aledo (2005), believe the phenomenon can be reduced to second home ownership. This is people who have surplus capital with which they purchase a second home somewhere nice and warm and cheap, and to which they may eventually move permanently. However, the studies I am citing are studies of something more than just second home ownership. In many cases the migrants are consolidating all their economic resources and moving (lock, stock and barrel, as it were) to a new primary home. Others are so keen to be a part of this race to a better quality of life that they rent property, and some even live in caravans and mobile homes in their search for the 'good life'. On the other hand, some second-home owners consider their 'second' home as equal first home - as a home not a house - and some spend considerable amounts of time per year there. What second home ownership *means* to people therefore varies. The lifestyle migration phenomenon is about moving from somewhere more expensive to somewhere cheaper in order to improve one's quality of life (for all or part of the year). Buying a second home may be one way of achieving this.

Is it Intra-European or North-South?

Some have conceptualised the migrations above as Intra-European or North-South migration; thus characterising trends in terms of direction of movement. I am sure some of the trends in this phenomenon were motivated, at least in part, by the freedom of movement of individuals written into European legislation in the Maastricht Treaty. Intra-European migration flows increased when this was first introduced in 1992 and again subsequently in conjunction with ebbs and flows in exchange rates, and, later, (after the introduction of the Euro) has been shaped by the position of the local economies in the sending countries. However, intra-European migration as a phenomenon is broader than this and must include, for example, the recent surge in movement of Polish to the UK and Romanians to Spain, and the forecasted similar moves involving new member states. These latter movements are not part of the phenomenon covered by this paper, being more easily described as labour or economic migration than lifestyle migration. On the other hand I would include non-intra-European trends such as North American second home owners in Mexico, Europeans moving to Marrakech, and Quebecers (snowbirds) in Florida. I would also include West to East moves, such as the increase in French and British second (and first) home owners in Croatia within the lifestyle phenomenon.

The phenomenon this paper identifies is both a movement of people from North to South and from West to East, which is counter to what are perceived as contemporary migration moves (Faist 2000). However, to be more precise these are individuals who have relatively more economic capital (and possibly other forms of capital), who move to less economically-developed areas, where the cost of living or property is cheaper. So, if North to South encapsulates the idea of wealthy to less wealthy then it offers something. But these people are not simply moving because the place they go to is cheaper, otherwise they would be as likely to go to the Outer Hebrides or rural China as Andalusia or the Italian Riviera. The places they go to signify quality of life.

Seasonal/temporary

Is this seasonal migration or temporary migration? Much lifestyle migration is seasonal or temporary (living part-time in the new place, or simply moving there for a while to see how it goes). This includes second-home owners who go to the new country when they can but retain commitments at home, and peripatetic migrants who perhaps have homes and jobs in more than one place. However, there are also lifestyle migrants who move permanently to the new place, with no intention of returning home – ever. So we cannot characterise them all as seasonal or temporary. Furthermore, the term 'seasonal migration' includes movements that are very different to what we are trying to conceptualise here; for examples, the migration of rural labour in India, and Mexican seasonal farm labourers in Canada (see Basok 2003, Mosse 2002, Rogaly 2002). What unites lifestyle migrants is the search for a different quality of life and having the financial capital to enable them to try this out. Buying a second home and spending some of the year in it, or moving temporarily to a new place to try a new way of life, then, are merely means to an end. The end is a new style of life.

Explaining Lifestyle Migration

The concepts of retirement, later life, seasonal, temporary, north-south, Intra European migration or second home ownership are not then uniting the phenomenon in the way that we want them to. None of them is mutually exclusive and fully inclusive, and none of them taps into migrant motivations. However, they are suggesting some common themes. To repeat, lifestyle migrants are relatively affluent individuals, moving, en masse, either part or full time, permanently or temporarily, to countries where the cost of living and/or the price of property is cheaper; places which, for various reasons, signify a better quality or pace of life. They are not moving for purposes of work. They are not labour migrants, refugees or asylum seekers, nor are they corporate elites, intellectuals or expatriates. They are often, but not always, later-life migrants and often partially or fully retired. Younger and working migrants are also moving but, still, the move is not motivated by the search for work - work is the means to an end.

Lifestyle Migrant motivations

The main reasons for moving for migrants within the trends outlined above are: the lifestyle (quality of life, pace of life, slower, relaxed life); the climate/ sun (which enables health and relaxation); the cost of living, cheap property (enabling early retirement and/or a better lifestyle); a business opportunity (to fund a better life); for a better life for the children; the culture (which includes community, respect for the elderly, safety, and less crime); closeness to home, and other ties and connections; the

desire to leave their home country (because of high crime rates, and too many immigrants!, or to escape the rat-race, failing business, unemployment, or the political situation); and to go somewhere 'you can be yourself'.

Overwhelmingly, respondents in the research projects reviewed cited quality of life, a relaxed way of life, or a slower pace of life as reasons for moving. It is difficult to be sure what they mean by this. Rodriguez and colleagues (1998) summarise it as 'the relaxed and informal way of life'. A review paper (Casado-Diaz et. al. 2004), notes that four out of five migrants cited the climate as one of their top reasons for migration. However, in the expanded comments collected qualitatively, references to climate are enigmatic, with interviewees referring to health, lifestyle, morale and even financial aspects as if these are somehow connected to the climate. The Mediterranean life (encapsulating cuisine, wine, a slow pace of life, and outdoor living) was also commonly cited, along with the cost of living. Madden's business owners on the Costa del Sol, when asked why they moved, listed climate, quality of life and lifestyle before business opportunities: 'to many of the business owners, opening a business in the Costa del Sol is also a way of funding a different lifestyle' (1999: p33). Catherine Puzzo's (2006) British emigrants to France explain their migration in terms of escape from a hectic way of life, to a better pace of life and better cost of living. The relative cost of living comes up over and over again. Deschamps' (2006) Europeans in France, for example, were attracted to less concentrated areas where land was cheap. For Rojas and Sunil (2006) many North American retirement migrants are seeking homes in less developed countries, such as Mexico and Costa Rica because of the relative cost of property and cost of living.

Some are looking for sun and others for the rural life. Marion Marceau (2006) wonders whether this sort of migration is ultimately sun-seeking, while King et al (2000) separate out, among their retired British migrants in Southern Europe, those on the one hand who are looking for a relaxed life in the sun from those who seem more motivated by the search for the *rural idyll*. Thomas Deschamps (2006) notes how Europeans in France are attracted by the pull of the countryside, and Michaela Lord (2006) shows how British migrants in France perpetuate images of French rural life through their migration stories. Raluca Nagy (2006) argues that most of the European visitors to Romania (here blurring the travellers and settlers) come from foreign cities in search of rural environments in which to buy a second home or to settle. Andreas Huber and Karen O'Reilly (2004) note how this search for the rural idyll includes a search for heimat (home, belonging and community) the perceived loss of which marks contemporary western lifestyles. Nearness to home remains a common theme. Rachida Saigh Bousta (2006) argues that the attractions of Marrakech, for its European residents and second home owners, are its nearness to Europe, followed by its infrastructure (which has been developed for tourism), and heritage, the weather, and relative cheapness. Deschamps also notes the importance for his migrants of being near a border.

The search for the rural idyll and a new home, or somewhere not too far from home, includes a gaze in which the new community is exotic and strange. David Wills (2006) has reviewed written accounts of British migrants who decided to 'escape' to Greece and describes the way in which Greece is so often constructed as an exotic other – a phenomenon with parallels in Italy and Spain, he argues. Gustafson (2002: 9) similarly demonstrates the way his seasonal migrants had a tendency to 'construct Spain as idyllic, exotic and at times a bit backward when compared to Sweden'.

Finally, it is common for lifestyle migrants to describe their reasons for moving in the context of comparisons with the home country. In other words, they

will outline what the new place has to offer that their own country does not. So, Finnish migrants escape high taxes, high prices, unemployment and a poor climate (Karisto 2005); Germans in the Balearics obtain a more peaceful and more secure quality of life than they had at home (Salvá Tomás 2005); Norwegian migrants talk of how they do not want to grow old in Norway (Helset et al); and British lifestyle migrants describe their move in the context of escape, from stressful jobs or the threat of unemployment, but also from high crime rates, run-down inner city areas, and dangerous neighbourhoods.

Counterurbanisation and the Rural Idyll

It is not difficult to see the connections between these motivations and the theme of the rural idyll, so common in counterurbanisation literature. The term has been used to describe and account for the movement of people out of cities and metropolitan areas towards more rural areas (Halliday and Coombes 1995), but over time and varied applications the term has become stretched (Cloke 1985) and chaotic (Mitchell 2004). But counterurbanisation literature consistently notes the theme of the rural idyll – that is the pull of the countryside as a way of life. The essential elements that the rural idyll incorporates are a less hurried lifestyle, peace and quiet, space and greenness (van Dam et al 2002). The countryside is constructed or (mis)represented as somewhere people have more time for each other, with a more close-knit community, somewhere children can grow up in safety (Matthews et al 2000), free from the polluting presence of dangerous others, in stress-free environments away from the excesses and constraints of the city.

Some authors have described counterurbanisation as not just counter- but *anti*-urban or even anti-modern. Anti-urban motivations move people to escape crime, taxes, congestion and pollution and can include 'back to the land' moves, quality of life moves to smaller communities and even amenity-driven retirement migration (Mitchell 2004). Counterurbanisation flows are essentially out of urban and towards rural (or non-urban) areas. But, as Halliday and Coombes (1995) have noted, the places some people choose to move to are chosen because of ideas they have about them and the way they are constructed and represented rather than what is actually intrinsic to the places themselves. The interpretations and meanings of a place, refracted through a range of media, matter more than the actual qualities we can objectively describe. The concrete attributes and characteristics labelled 'rural' means the term does not actually have to coincide with the countryside as such; rurality can be constructed, sought or created elsewhere (see Boyle et al. 1998, van Dam et al 2002).

Counterurbanisation then is about the search for a different way of life (or lifestyle). When once the countryside was marketed as offering a way of life, a refuge from modernity, as well as hearth and home, now increasingly distant lands are meant to provide the same meanings; they are being constructed in the same ways.

Lifestyle migration could be described as a form of counterurbanisation since so many of the motivations for the move are encapsulated in the images and representations of the rural idyll. Even where migrants have moved from cities or rural areas to fairly hectic and fast-moving developed areas such as the Costa del Sol, the reasons they give for leaving have resonance with the anti-urban and anti-modern sentiments of counterurbanites. Arguably, then, lifestyle migration is simply a variation of an old theme in migration.

Tourism

One aspect of lifestyle migration that I have not mentioned so far is that almost all of the trends outlined above have a connection with tourism. This is a clear case of what Williams and Hall (2000) have called tourism-informed mobility. Often the migration is to tourism destinations (the Costa del Sol, the Algarve, Dubrovnik, Istria); many of the migrants visited the area first as tourists, liked what they saw and decided to settle more permanently; many blur tourism and migration in terms of lifestyles and mobility patterns (O'Reilly 2003); the infrastructure developed for tourism supports second home ownership and more permanent settlement; and the regular presence of masses of tourists of one's own nationality has prompted new migrants to settle and provide services and goods specifically for the tourists and, later, for the settled migrants.

Tourism, of course, is based on all those distinctions Urry (1990) recognised between leisure and work, home and away, everyday and holiday. It is about escaping the drudgery of routine in order to gaze on the exotic and other. It is (more often than not) affluent people visiting poorer places. It provides the perfect setting for an anti-modern migration in search of community, security, leisure and tranquillity. Even MacCannell's (1999) more discerning traveller as pilgrim, in search of the authentic experience, can turn this search into a way of life.

The search for a better quality of life, for utopia, the rural idyll, escape and the opportunity to start again are nothing new. However, tourism constructs these ideals in actual places, markets them and makes them possible as lifestyle choices. Still, these ideas and beliefs can only be acted upon because we have a given set of unique conditions.

Material and historical conditions

Lifestyle migration is the result of a convergence of factors, so that explanation has to separate the historical and material preconditions enabling the phenomenon from what migrants want to do – the motivations for migration - and how this is achieved in practice. The relevant historical developments and material conditions can be summarised with a few buzz words and definitions:

- Globalisation: global economic, social, cultural, technological and political changes leading to increased interconnectedness and/or interdependence, combined with the increased sense of the world as a single place (Robertson 1992).

- The globalisation and turbulence of migration, leading to increased mobility, and complexity, to an increase in the numbers of countries affected by migration and to a diversity of migrants (Castles and Miller 2003, Papastergiadis 2000).

- The spread of communications: the rise of information technology and the network society; the spread of mass communications; but also improved travel routes, cheap and expanded air and road travel, and the relationship of these to what we might label time-space compression, Giddens 1990), liquid modernity (Bauman 2000), or the network society (Castells 2000)

- Mobility: the development of mass tourism, in which more people visit more places than ever before, and now the travel, fluidity, flow and flux that

arguably characterise modern life (Urry 2000, or see Franklin, 2003, for a discussion of Bauman's '*Tourist Syndrome'*).

- Rising living standards and an increase in expendable wealth, the rise in second home ownership, and unprecedented rises in property values in some parts of the world (and for some groups therein) and especially relative to other parts of the world (see Hutton 2003)

- Flexibility in labour markets, the end of the 'job for life', more working from home, the ability to live and work in different places, and with these, increased leisure time in affluent societies, extended holidays, early retirement, and flexible working lives (Pollert 1991, Michie and Sheehan 2003).

- Migration chains, in which, through the construction of networks, migration movements, once begun, become self-sustaining social processes (Castles and Miller 2003).

- The role of intermediaries – estate agents, financial institutions, mass media (eg. property pornography) - all promoting and enabling migrations.

Conclusion

This paper argues that a new form of international migration is emerging which involves affluent migrants, much as traditional, colonial migrations have, but which is new in terms of motivations and objective conditions. The various ways this migration has been conceptualised to date are either misleading or inadequate. This trend (and its various streams) has emerged under certain historical conditions, especially globalisation, increased mobility, flexibility, and increased relative wealth, but remains motivated by fairly constant themes, encapsulated in the concepts of the rural idyll and images and representations associated with tourism and travel. I would like to finish by considering why such a privileged group should be the subject of ongoing scientific attention.

First of all the phenomenon is both growing and diversifying. Residential tourism (characterised by short-termism, second home ownership, and long holidays) has led to retirement migration (retirement from work lending the opportunity to start a new life somewhere else), and then to lifestyle migration. It has included younger and working groups, has spread to other (including more rural) areas, and to new countries and continents. At the same time the US snowbird phenomenon has become more long-term and has spread further south. There is evidence that the phenomenon is spreading to more distant lands, if expatriate and property marketing web sites and magazines are anything to go by. A key dynamic is property prices.

While the absolute numbers of those in search of the rural idyll or an escape from modernity may be small, the net effect on the culture, economy and environment in a small community can be far-reaching. These migration streams are not evenly distributed geographically, but are concentrated in tourist and travel areas, and adjoining less-developed areas (especially, in Spain, the Costa del Sol and the Costa Blanca). In the areas most affected there are some municipalities with a majority of foreign populations and schools with more migrant than local pupils. One observed impact (Tremblay and O'Reilly 2004) is that the new place becomes developed (urban or modern, faster, more crowded, less safe, less small-scale) and then loses its appeal

for the lifestyle migrant. As van Dam et al (2002) point out, the ideas, associations and actions that places represent are dynamic. When migrants' experiences fail to match their idyllic expectations they will alter their images and hence the way these places are thence represented to others. They then try to move on to newer places, in the continuing search for the idyllic lifestyle. Future research projects also need to pay attention to lifestyle migrants' reasons for leaving home (and thus the impact on the home country), to interactions and tensions between migrants and hosts, and to the impact of rising property prices and environmental damage in the host area.

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