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Migration and the search for a better way of life: a critical exploration of lifestyle migration

Abstract

For the past few years, the term 'lifestyle migration' has been used to refer to an increasing number of people who take the decision to migrate based on their belief that there is a more fulfilling way of life available to them elsewhere. Lifestyle migration is thus a growing, disparate phenomenon, with important but little understood implications for both societies and individuals. This article outlines and explores in detail a series of mobilities that share in common relative affluence and this search for a better lifestyle. We attempt to define the limits of the term lifestyle migration, the characteristics of the lifestyle sought, and the place of this form of migration in the contemporary world. In this manner, we map the various migrations that can be considered under this broad rubric, recognising the similarities and differences in their migration trajectories. Further to this, drawing on the sociological literature on lifestyle, we provide an initial theoretical conceptualisation of this phenomenon, attempting to explain its recent escalation in various guises, and investigating the historical, sociological, and individualised conditions that inspire this migration. This article is thus the first step in defining a broader programme for the study of lifestyle migration. We contend that the study of this migration is especially important in the current era given the impact such moves have on places and people at both ends of the migratory chain.

Introduction

In this article, we explore the usefulness of 'lifestyle migration' as an analytical tool in explaining a budding sociological phenomenon: the relocation of people from/in the developed world searching for a better way of life. We outline the unique characteristics of this form of migration, locating this migratory trend as a consequence of particular historical, sociological, and individualised conditions. In this manner, we present a new way of conceptualising a trend that runs counter to the most important or numerically dominant streams as identified by most migration researchers (e.g. Bommers and Morawska 2005; Castles and Miller 2003; Papastergiadis 2000), yet appears to be a historical continuation of earlier mobilities including the Grand Tour, adventure travel, and voluntary, temporary, and 'love' migration (King 2002). While it is recognised that broadly speaking the search for a better way of life is meaningful for all migrants, this paper examines a growing range of contemporary mobilities that intimate the growing interest in lifestyle within sociology.

The migration of relatively affluent individuals has been largely overlooked in the more general literature on migration. Where affluent migrants have been studied, the major focus has been on professional expatriates (see for example Amit 2001, 2002; Amit-Talai 1998; Beaverstock 2002; Cohen 1977; Fechter 2007; Iredale 2001; Nowicka 2006) or International Retirement Migration, with a particular focus on policy implications (see for example Casado-Díaz 2006; Helset *et al.* 2005; Rodríguez *et al.* 2005; Schriewer and García 2005). As Aledo Tur (2005) has noted, a policy focus tends to exclude relatively affluent migrants who do not fit the stereotypical idea of a migrant in the given destinations, do not compete for jobs, nor tend not to be racialised as other immigrants. Despite the significant and increasing number of affluent individuals migrating in search of a better way of life (with an increasing number of locations involved as both sending communities and destinations), in general they remain poorly understood and conceptualised. We contend that the study of these relatively affluent migrants is especially important in the current era given the impact such moves has on places and people at both ends of the migratory chain (Mantecón 2008).

Since this phenomenon of moving for a better way of life has rarely been covered by standard migration typologies (but see King 2002), researchers have attempted to link their studies to wider phenomena using umbrella concepts such as, *inter alia*, retirement migration, leisure migration, (international) counterurbanisation, second home ownership, amenity-seeking and seasonal migration. None of these conceptualisations, however, is fully inclusive in grasping the complexity of this trend and uniting its various elements. In all of these cases, research shows a common narrative through which respondents render their lives meaningful (Cortazzi 2001): the search for a different lifestyle, a significantly better quality of life, underlying migration. We argue here that despite the peculiarity of each case, these common lifestyle concerns demonstrate that these different migrations can be considered as a single phenomenon – lifestyle migration.

As we perceive it, lifestyle migrants are relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that, for various reasons, signify, for the migrant, a better quality of life. Ethnographic accounts especially have revealed a narrative of escape permeating migrants' accounts of the decision to migrate, further emphasised by their negative presentations of life before migration. Migration is thus often described using language like 'getting out of the trap', 'making a fresh start', 'a new beginning' (e.g. Helset *et al.* 2005; Karisto 2005; Salvá Tomás 2005). The fundamental features of the different lifestyles sought thus include the re-negotiation of the work/life balance, quality of life, and freedom from prior constraints. Through these strategies of reorientation, the migrants seek the greater good in life, however that might be perceived. Lifestyle migration is thus a search, a project, rather than an act, and it encompasses diverse destinations, desires, and dreams.

The search for a better way of life

The search for the good life as a comparative project is a consistent theme in lifestyle migration. Migrants retrospectively explain their specific relocation

contrasting the merits of the host community – the slow pace of life; the relative cost of living (including cheap property prices); the climate and health benefits; a feeling of community – with the shortcomings of home - rising levels of crime and unemployment; lack of community spirit; high-pressured lifestyles (or the ‘rat race’); and low quality of life (e.g. O’Reilly 2000; Sunil et al 2007). These narratives of decline have been removed from the individual and historiographic contexts, rather than being analysed as narrative (e.g. Buller and Hoggart 1994; King, Warnes, and Williams 2000). As retrospective stories, they may not reflect objective reality; the presented advantages of life in the destination are often romanticised accounts, while the migrants’ representations of the ills of their home society are often overstated. However, the exaggerated comparison between life before and after migration provides a rationalisation of this form of migration extending beyond the discussion of economic privilege. Through such narrative accounts, the migrants challenge their depiction as consumers, emphasising instead their substantial, personal reasons for migrating.

Migration stories thus additionally emphasise individualised, self-realisation narratives of the decision to migrate. Many stress the particular events and circumstances leading up to their migration, or explain their migration in relation to one watershed event (Benson 2007; Hoey 2005; O’Reilly 2000). This might be redundancy, a change in working status (e.g. retirement), or a bereavement, each of which is experienced as traumatic in some way. Migration is presented as a way of overcoming the trauma of these events, of taking control of their lives, or as releasing them from ties and enabling them to live lives more ‘true’ to themselves. Life after migration is thus presented as the antithesis of life before migration, not only generally, but also on a more personal level.

Because the fundamental features of the different lifestyles sought by such migrants include the good life, escape from past individual and community histories, and the opportunity for self-realisation, strategies post migration often include the re-negotiation of the work/life balance, and maintaining quality of life, and freedom from prior constraints. However, in order to achieve and maintain their new, preferable lifestyles, many migrants still need to generate income following migration, and it is common to find that they run small businesses, as ‘self-employed expatriates’ (Stone and Stubbs 2007). Their choice of enterprise varies, and while many work within tourism or providing services for other migrants, the advances in communications technology make the possibilities endless. Importantly, these lifestyle migrants use their businesses as a means to an end; they use them to fund their new lifestyles (Befus et al. 1988; Madden 1999; Stone and Stubbs 2007). For example, when small business owners on the Costa del Sol were asked why they moved, they listed climate, quality of life, and lifestyle ahead of business opportunities. Lifestyle remains the main priority (Madden 1999). Individuals often seek self-employment not because they cannot find work locally, but because they prefer being their own boss. As Stone and Stubbs argue, ‘working for others... was not part of the new life that they had envisaged’ (2007: 438). Self-employed, the migrants have a greater degree of control over how much they work, and thus maintain what they perceive as an

acceptable work-life balance. There is thus often a limit to how much the migrants will engage in the expansion – both in size and pecuniary terms – of their businesses, for fear that it will disturb the work-life balance they have established.

Importantly, entrepreneurial activities undertaken by these migrants are most often a departure from their careers in life before migration: Hoey's (2005) discovery that 'the pie guy' had previously worked as an engineer is perhaps the best example of the contrast between life before and after migration. It is often the case that many lifestyle migrants have little to no previous experience of establishing and running businesses, but so many of them take the opportunity of migrating to follow their dreams (some more successfully than others). In this respect, it can be seen that this form of migration does have a liberatory potential, instilling people with the idea that they can do anything they want. However, when viewed more clearly within the context of people's lives before migration, this apparent disjuncture is not so clear-cut. The migrants take transferable skills from their jobs before migration, which they then put to use in their new businesses.

As we have described in this section, the search for a better way of life is necessarily a comparative project. Presenting their migration within a comparative frame, the migrants provide an easily understandable justification for their migration. However, what is often understated is the effort migrants invest in making their dreams a reality, and achieving an appropriate work/life balance.

The search for idyllic places

The destinations chosen by lifestyle migrants tell us a lot about the lives they aspire to lead. The different or better way of life sought is diverse, and, to some extent, has specificity associated with the chosen destination that reflects apparently individual preferences and aspirations. This specificity warrants further investigation, but we can suggest a typology of destinations as a first step: the residential tourist, the rural idyll, and bourgeois bohemianism.

Residential tourism

The most renowned of lifestyle migrants have chosen destinations in coastal resorts or islands in the sun.ⁱ Reflecting the extensive public interest in these migrants, academic research on this 'heliotropic' migration has been relatively extensive, especially in relation to North-South migration, and with Spain as a favoured destination.ⁱⁱ Migrants are attracted to places such as the Algarve, Malta and the Costa del Sol with their characteristic 'Mediterranean lifestyle', incorporating cuisine, wine, a slow pace of life, and outdoor living (Casado-Díaz *et al.* 2006; King *et al.* 2000), features analogous to those stated by those seeking the rural idyll and the bohemian ideal, discussed below. Although these sun-seeking migrants could be portrayed as hedonistic 'residential tourists' (Aledo Tur 2005), the health benefits of the weather and the coast, as well as the relaxation and tranquillity associated with tourist destinations, act as a greater pull than any desire to be with other tourists (e.g. Sunil *et al.* 2007). Nevertheless, the imaginings and desires of these

coastal migrants are difficult to distinguish from the social construction of the spaces associated with mass tourism (O'Reilly 2003, 2007b). Coastal lifestyle migration emphasises escape, leisure, relaxation, and 'tourism as a way of life'.

The Rural Idyll

Rural locations are imagined to offer lifestyle migrants a sense of stepping back in time, getting back to the land, the simple or good life, as well as a sense of community spirit. While it is often the case in lifestyle migration that destinations are depicted as having the characteristics of rurality, the narratives of those who move to the countryside, whether at home or abroad, additionally stress the unique and embodied relationship that they have with the landscape (see for example Benson 2007; Geoffrey 2007). The everyday lives of migrants in these rural retreats are relatively understudied. There are, however, an increasing number of researchers studying the British and North European populations in France (see for example Deschamps 2006; Benson 2007, forthcoming; Geoffrey 2007; Smallwood 2007; Drake and Collard forthcoming). And we know that more and more people are seeking rural destinations; Spain has seen an increase in international buyers seeking rural properties, and new markets across Europe are opening up with, for example as Nagy (2006) argues, the Romanian countryside attracting European city dwellers with its relatively low-costs. And on the other side of the Atlantic, Hoey (2005) spearheads the interest in the relocation of middle-class migrants to non-metropolitan areas in an attempt to 'start over'. Further afield, there are North American communities in the highlands of Panama and Costa Rica who have yet to be studied, destinations that are equally marketed to migrants on the grounds that they offer escape. It will be interesting to explore the extent to which these unstudied migrations can also be considered forms of lifestyle migration.

Bourgeois Bohemians

Finally, there are migrants who seek alternative lifestyles in spaces that signify what we might define as bohemian ideals. These destinations are characterised by certain spiritual, artistic, or creative aspirations and unique 'cultural' experience. The terms spiritual and 'cultural' in our rendering are intended in the widest sense. Jacqueline Waldren's (1996) accounts of the outsiders – literary personalities, artists and musicians – of Deía, Mallorca is the seminal text on these bohemian ideals and the way that they intersect with the daily lives led in this particular Mediterranean village. More recently, Pola Bousiou (2008) presents an account of the *Mykoniots d'élection*, a group of people whose lives are characterised by their 'constant return to the island of Mykonos, Greece, and their insistence on living, acting, working and creating in a tourist space offers them an alternative identity' (2008: 3). For these self-ascribed 'nomads', this Greek island is a place on which they can inscribe their own alternative lifestyle. There are also a number of texts in preparation that equally concentrate on the perception that a bohemian form of living is available (see for example Korpela forthcoming; Trundle forthcoming), exploring diverse destinations such as Florence, Italy and Varanasi, India.

These disparate destinations are not in any sense mutually exclusive in what they putatively provide for the lifestyle migrant. We offer their description as a framework for examining the similarities and differences in lifestyle migration narratives. It further reflects our efforts to consider what might be included in the definition of an emergent trend and what the uniqueness of each destination (or imagining) might offer to the paradigm. As there is, to date, comparatively little literature on lifestyle migration, there is plenty of scope for the field to expand. There are many migration trends which could be thus categorised and which have, to our knowledge, not yet been examined.

Narratives that emphasise the value of particular places and landscapes highlight that how individuals perceive destinations is the result of a complex interaction between their prior experiences of a location, wider culturally-specific imaginings (distributed primarily through the media and 'property pornography'), certain historical and material conditions, alongside their individual circumstances (including cultural, educational, and economic capital) at the point of migration. The choice of destination, while also an intentional choice about how to live, is thus the product of both structural constraints and individual agency. We will now consider some of these wider circumstances, beginning with a critical look at two ways these migrations have been conceptualised to date: as (residential) tourism and as counter-urbanisation.

Conceptualising Lifestyle Migration

Tourism

Much lifestyle migration is a clear case of what Williams and Hall (2002) have called tourism-informed mobility. In this rendering, migrants develop a taste for a particular way of life while on holiday in an area, and subsequently decide to migrate, encouraged by their imaginings of the place as offering a better lifestyle. Simply, tourist destinations (for example the Costa del Sol, the Algarve, the Dordogne) become migration destinations. In some cases, the migration destination continues to be socially constructed in terms of holiday and its concomitant meanings (Shields 1991), with lifestyle migrants seeming loathe to have their lives structured and routinised (O'Reilly 2000). Therefore, in terms of the lifestyle sought and the destination chosen, there is a partial overlap between lifestyle migration and tourism, (O'Reilly 2003 and 2007b). But to apply a persistent 'holiday feel' to the lives of all lifestyle migrants would, in our opinion, serve an injustice to these populations, many of whom actively strive to show that they are different from tourists who are often negatively stereotyped (see for example Benson 2007; Oliver 2007; Waldren 1996, 1997).

From another angle, the study of tourism as a phenomenon can inform our exploration of lifestyle migration (O'Reilly 2003). 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 the routine in order to 'gaze' on the exotic and other; the perfect foundation for an anti-modern migration in search of community, security, leisure, and tranquillity. The pursuit of a better way of life that characterises lifestyle migration is the tourist's pursuit of authentic experience (MacCannell 1976)

made epic, an embedded feature of daily life within the destination (cf. Benson 2007; O'Reilly 2007b). Tourism facilitates this form of migration by constructing and marketing ideals. Through this process, these ideals become feasible and attainable lifestyle choices.

Despite the links between the two, it is important not to reduce lifestyle migration to tourism as this undermines the diverse motivations and experiences of the migrants. Not all lifestyle migration began as tourism, and there has yet to be an adequate explanation of why people might want to turn their experiences from tourism into a way of life.

Counterurbanisation

The study of counterurbanisation may also shed some light on lifestyle migration. Used to describe and account for the physical movement of populations out of cities and metropolitan areas towards more rural areas, counterurbanisation has tended to focus on trends and flows (Halliday and Coombes 1995). However, researchers are increasingly adding a motivational element to their definition (Mitchell 2004). While there are various motivations that might drive people to move to rural areas, including house prices, overcrowding, retirement, and the green movement, the most-documented motivation listed in the counterurbanisation literature is 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 thus 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), a stress-free environment away from the excesses and constraints of the city. There is an additional sense that this kind of move is motivated in part by more extreme anti-urban motivations, with counterurbanisation operating as an escape from high crime levels, taxes, congestion and pollution. Counterurban migrations can therefore include 'back to the land' moves, quality of life moves to smaller communities, and even amenity-driven retirement migration (Mitchell 2004).

In the perception of the counterurbanising population, their destinations offer them the antithesis of the lives that they are leaving behind. Indeed, this attraction to the countryside has already been well documented in the case of the British in rural France (Buller and Hoggart 1994; Barou and Prado 1995; Benson 2007). However, it is the case that the interpretations and meanings of a place, refracted through a range of media, matter more to migrants than the actual qualities that can be objectively described (Halliday and Coombes 1995). As a result, 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). Bearing in mind this social construction of rurality, when once the countryside was marketed as offering an alternative way of life, an escape from the ills of modernity and the city, now distant lands hold the same meanings; in other words, they are being constructed in the same ways.

Lifestyle migration shares the motivations characteristic of counter-urbanisation with migrants commonly stressing their anti-modern and anti-urban sentiments. Within the counterurbanisation discourse, it has been concluded that all destinations signify the same thing to individuals: a different and better way of life to that led before migration. How this then translates into their everyday experiences of life following migration is, however, something that remains overlooked within the counterurbanisation discourse.

Explaining Lifestyle Migration

From the preceding discussion, it is apparent that both tourism and counterurbanisation offer a specific lens through which this migration might be better perceived. However, their explanations do not look at how the act of migration intersects with life more generally. By encapsulating this form of migration within the term lifestyle, we shift the focus from the movement itself to the lifestyle choices inherent within the decision to migrate. In this manner, we re-place migration in the context of the lives led before and after migration and draw attention away from the movement as a singular event. The initial migration thus emerges as one point of the journey *en route* to a better way of life (Benson 2007). Lifestyle migration is thus intrinsic to the lifestyle trajectories of individuals, a part of their reflexive project of the self (or the search for a potential self as Hoey (2005) describes), whereby migrants escape disillusionment through seeking an alternative lifestyle. Studies of this phenomenon should concentrate, therefore, not only on the reasoning and circumstances leading to migration, but also on how these inform experiences of life within the destination. Lifestyle migration, as a conceptualisation, thus holds at its core a commitment to a more nuanced insight into individual circumstances (including phase in the life course, Oliver 2007) and their influence on the trajectory of lives following migration, while also recognising that there are various historical and material prerequisites for this form of migration.

Lifestyle and habitus

The relocation of lifestyle migrants can broadly be defined as indicative of a fundamental change in lifestyle, signifying a break, a contrast, a turning point, and a new beginning. In this respect, the decision to migrate is a lifestyle choice. But what do we mean by lifestyle in this case and what is the impact of these choices? Many of the previous studies on this search for a better way of life emphasise its links to consumption (see for example King *et al.* 2000; Sunil *et al.* 2007; Williams and Hall 2002). With this in mind, we consider the insights offered by sociological theorists who make explicit the link between consumption and lifestyle (e.g. Beck 1992; Bauman 2000; Giddens 1991). Common to these accounts is the notion that society has now entered post, late, second, or liquid modernity (depending on the author), characterised by the demise of traditional social structures and divisions of labour, and a greater degree of consumer choice. Lifestyle, within this contemporary consumer society, is a life project for the individual, part of the reflexive project of the self (Giddens 1991), in which we unremittingly, but never routinely, engage, in order to make sense of who we are and our place in the world. The lifestyle choices that individuals make thus, 'give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity' (Giddens 1991: 81). Consumption enables

individuals to sustain a coherent lifestyle reflecting their self-identity. These approaches to the study of lifestyle thus argue that, 'engaging in a particular lifestyle no longer reflects our already existing status as members of a particular class, for example, but says something about who we – as *individuals* – have decided we want to be' (Sweetman 2003: 529 original italics).

While there is undoubtedly something appealing about the idea that we have such extensive freedom of choice, the pervading criticism of this emphasis on the individual is that it fails to account for the persisting influence of social structures on the individual. For example, it remains unclear why the 'goods' people seek (community, security, tranquillity) seem to remain so consistent. In contrast to these approaches, Bourdieu (1984) presents a more structurally aware description of lifestyle, linking consumption practices, lifestyle, and social position. In this rendering, lifestyles emerge as the result of particular material circumstances, and a specific class habitus; all lifestyle choices are thus mediated through our habitus, our embodied class-culture.

Bourdieu's (1984) approach has been accused of being overly deterministic, with individuals operating like robots to reproduce the wider structures of which they are part (Jenkins 1992, 2000). Caught in a continuous loop circulating between structure and habitus (Jenkins 2000 cited in Sweetman 2003), there is little scope for individuals to engage in actions that are out of keeping with their class dispositions. However, in response to these criticisms, Bourdieu himself emphasises that he intends habitus as a generative structure, with the 'infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production' (1990: 55). The concept of habitus thus allows for invention and improvisation, such as lifestyle projects, while placing certain limits upon these.

While habitus provides us with a middle ground to think beyond the structure agency dichotomy, Bourdieu's theories have been accused of lacking historical specificity as reflexivity has no role other than at times of crisis when habitus and social field no longer match (Calhoun 1993; Margolis 1999). In response to these criticisms, a number of scholars have examined the possibility of a habitus including the post-/late modern characteristic of reflexivity. Their claims are premised on the idea certain individuals may live with a constant lack of fit between their habitus and social field, a permanent state of disruption from their social position (see for example Calhoun 1993; Featherstone 1991; Sweetman 2003). Of these, the most applicable in our case is Sweetman's approach, an approach claiming to be more widely applicable than other approaches, which are limited to certain occupational groups (Calhoun 1993) and the *petit bourgeoisie* (Featherstone 1991). The ubiquity of this approach appeals to us because it can incorporate the various individuals and migrations categorised under the heading of lifestyle migration. In Sweetman's (2003) rendering, it is precisely because of the abundance of choice that we have no choice other than to adopt reflexivity to help us make decisions. Certain individuals thus experience reflexivity as second nature. Lifestyle choices are therefore a response to the increased

demands on individuals to behave reflexively:

... the adoption of particular lifestyles... whilst dependent initially upon a reflexive engagement with the various options that are available, may also reflect an attempt to evade demands for an ongoing reflexivity and to fix, or 'anchor' the self in what can be regarded as a modernist response to the contemporary social terrain (Sweetman 2003: 543; see also Sweetman 1999).

So, while it may at first sight appear that lifestyle migration is a purely individualised action, driven by particular forces of consumption and self-realisation, on reflection it becomes clear that even for these privileged migrants, there are certain limits to their actions that they cannot escape (and may not even be aware of). It is also evident from their accounts of the decision to migrate that reflexivity was a central feature of this particular lifestyle choice. As Bauman (2000) noted, we now have no choice but to constantly make choices, to seek the novel, to change.

The lifestyle migration project can thus be seen as an inevitable outcome of late modernity in which individuals are constrained to seek their own styles of life yet remain constrained within their own habitus, which in many ways prescribes the outcome. Migration enables individuals to begin to establish a way of living that they feel is preferable to life before migration. In this respect, their actions demonstrate that they reflect on their particular circumstances, acting to improve their lot in life; that they make choices demonstrates that, to a degree, lifestyle migration is an individualised action. However, while they stress that they are in the process of realising their dreams, it is evident that these remain informed by their lives before migration, and in this respect, are not the break from their pasts that they had previously envisaged (see Benson 2007; O'Reilly 2007a). They bring with them skills, expectations, and aspirations from their lives before migration. Their lifestyle choices thus remain mediated by their habitus, and framed by their levels of symbolic capital. In other words, their relative symbolic capital (incorporating educational, cultural, and social capital) impacts on the decision to migrate and the destinations chosen, but also the life then led in the destination. For example, many of the trends we have outlined above lead to the inscribing of social inequalities onto social space, resulting in what Bourdieu (1993) has called site effects, yet this remains to be explored in depth by any studies.

Historical and Material Conditions

Thus far, we have provided an explanation of lifestyle migration that demonstrates that individual motivations are influenced by wider structural concerns. At present, there are unprecedented numbers of people moving for a better way of life, and we argue that without certain historical and material conditions, namely relative economic privilege and the ease of movement, these levels would never have been attained. As Amit (2007) argues, all movement is possible because of asymmetrical distinction; those who travel can do so because they have access to certain resources, namely money and time, while others do not.

The economic privilege of lifestyle migrants has been well documented in the case of IRM and second-home owners. A standard explanation of IRM

includes the discussion of how these migrants are of a generation, the baby-boomers, who have, for the first time in the history of the Western world, high levels of expendable wealth accumulated during their working lives and from the assets gained from property. This economic privilege facilitates the search for a new and different way of life. Second-home owners are also emblematic of this trend, purchasing, with their surplus capital, second homes somewhere with a good climate, relatively cheap, and fairly close to home (Aledo Tur 2005). As with lifestyle migrants more generally, these second-home owners buy in areas which variously represent something more 'authentic', a 'real life' (Hall and Müller 2004).

The example set by second-home owners and retirement migrants helps to explain how relative economic privilege facilitates migration. In many cases, it allows individuals to purchase a property in the destination without a mortgage, lowering the daily cost of living substantially. However, this recognition masks the various levels of economic privilege experienced by lifestyle migrants. For example, while second-home owners have a metaphorical foot in each (or many) location(s), to fund their lifestyles, many lifestyle migrants have had to consolidate all their economic resources to move (lock, stock, and barrel, as it were) to a new primary home (O'Reilly 2007). Others are so keen to be a part of this race to a better quality of life that they rent property, and some – like the Australian Grey Nomads and the American Snowbirds (Onyx and Leonard 2005) – even live in caravans and mobile homes.

Relative economic privilege facilitates further travel following migration. In the contemporary world, the spread of communications means that it is easier to keep in touch with friends and family, but it is also easier to travel to see them. Low-cost airlines and the ease of road travel also encourage the idea of lifestyle migration, as distances seem to become smaller. But there is also the relaxing of borders in Europe, allowing for freedom of movement between member states. And in other parts of the world, receiving states, which are keen to profit economically from incoming migrants, encourage lifestyle migration across borders. In Panama and Costa Rica for example, there are special visas for US citizens, both for retirees and for those wanting to set up business, which smooth over the otherwise complicated bureaucracy involved in moving from one country to another.

Undoubtedly, globalisation has a role to play in the rise of this form of migration. Our awareness of our place in the world has changed in line with an increasing sense of the world as a single place (Robertson 1992), perceived time-space compression (Giddens 1990), and our increased involvement in the network society (Castells 2000). The rise in the number of lifestyle migrants reflects also the increasing mobility in the world, with an increasing number of countries and individuals affected by migration (Castles and Miller 2003; Faist 2000; Papastergiadis 2000), and the development of mass tourism. But other changes affecting the individual more directly also prompt lifestyle migration. With rising living standards and an increase in expendable wealth, more and more people in the developed world can make informed and financially viable *choices* about their lifestyles. This is also aided

by more flexibility in work lives and in the way we perceive our lives, heralded by an increased reflexivity. Finally, we should not forget that there are intermediaries who help us to make decisions about our lives. In the case of lifestyle migration, these include estate agents, financial institutions – not only helping us to organise the finances to move abroad, easing the process of moving with tailored relocation advice and support – and the mass media with its extensive ‘property pornography’.

Conclusion

In this article we have argued that a form of international migration is developing which involves affluent migrants, much as traditional, colonial migrations have, but which is distinct in terms of motivations and objective conditions. The various ways that this trend, which we label lifestyle migration, has been conceptualised to date, do not allow for a nuanced and inclusive understanding of the phenomenon to emerge. It is evident from the theoretical discussion presented here, that this form of migration has grown as a result of very particular historical and material conditions, particularly globalisation, increased mobility, flexibility, and increased relative wealth. Furthermore, while it is evident that there are common motivations – the search for a better way of life and the ideology of escape, themes similarly present in discussions of travel and tourism – the way that these are configured varies depending on the circumstances of the migrants’ lives before migration. Cases of lifestyle migration can only be fully understood, therefore, by examining the decision to migrate within the context of the migrants’ lives before migration, but also by taking into account the particularities of their lives following migration.

Lifestyle migration is a novel extension of a phenomenon with a history, made possible as a result of global developments of the past 50 or 60 years. It relates specifically to the relative economic privilege of individuals in the developed world, the reflexivity evident in the post-/late modernity, the construction of particular places as offering alternative lifestyles, and a more general ease (or freedom) of movement. As we have argued in this article, lifestyle migration occurs as a result of the reflexive assessment of opportunities – whether life will be better here or there – but these opportunities are not limitless; they emerge from the habitus of the individual, and are thus constrained. In this rendering, the rapid increase in the numbers of lifestyle migrants cannot simply be explained as the result of increased levels of economic privilege, but is more specifically related to the increased levels of reflexivity in the contemporary world. The search for a better way of life, while held in common with other migrants such as refugees and asylum seekers, here implies something distinct, connoting a particular lifestyle choice specific to individuals of the developed world. The current growth and diversity of lifestyle migration is thus a product arising from the historical and material conditions of post- or late modernity.

We would like to finish by considering why such a privileged group should be the subject of ongoing scientific attention. Firstly, the phenomenon is both growing and diversifying. In the last ten to fifteen years, residential tourism in some areas (characterised by short-term residence, second-home ownership, and extended holidays) has paved the way for retirement migration

(retirement from work lending the opportunity to start a new life elsewhere), and blossomed into lifestyle migration. Increasing numbers of working-age individuals can be counted among the ranks of these 'lifestyle migrants', similarly seeking new and more fulfilling ways of living. And if expatriate and property marketing websites and magazines are anything to go by, there is evidence that the phenomenon is spreading to lands that are more distant. Secondly, there are important considerations in terms of the impact that these migrants may have on receiving communities. For, while the absolute numbers of those migrating from developed societies in search of a better quality of life may be small, the net effect on the culture, economy, and environment of a small community can be far-reaching. This is particularly so where an area has attracted a large concentration of lifestyle migrants. In some cases, this has led to a majority foreign population, which has massive implications for local public services and welfare provision. Ironically, in the process of gaining the better way of life that they seek, the migrants may effectively destroy their goal as their destinations become increasingly developed (Tremblay and O'Reilly 2004; Benson 2007).

Future research projects need to examine the impact of this form of migration on the communities left behind as well in as the destinations. They need to examine more closely the interactions between migrants and hosts, as well as recognising the true impact of rising property prices and environmental damage to the host area (Aledo Tur 2005). Franklin (2003) is right to note that tourism-related migration leaves positive traces in the form of enduring and meaningful relationships between people and places, that places become twinned and linked. But it is entirely plausible that such links are asymmetrical (Amit 2007), that some groups benefit while others lose out, and that the shift in power and capital consolidates rather than confounds existing differences.

In this exploratory article, we have presented both the general characteristics of lifestyle migration, and a brief account of some of the historical and material conditions from which it emerges. The exploratory framework we present here is intended as a way of conceptualising this migration phenomenon. However, it is evident that over the next few years, this phenomenon will have an increasing impact on sending and receiving communities. Our aim is not to present a homogenised category, a one-size-fits-all model. Within this framework, we allow much scope for diversity and movement, and anticipate that as this field of study expands, there will be further dialogue as to the way that this framework can be developed and refined. As it stands we reiterate our broad, working definition of the phenomenon, as 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.

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ⁱ We use the term 'renowned' here to reflect the extensive media coverage of these migrants, which includes television documentaries, soap operas, and regular newspaper articles.

ⁱⁱ In particular, there has been a persistent interest in Northern European and Scandinavian migration to coastal Spain. See Aledo 2005; Casado-Díaz 2006; Gustafson 2001; Huber and O'Reilly 2004; Helset et al. 2005; Karisto 2005; Oliver 2007a & b; O'Reilly 2000; Rodríguez et al. 2005; Schriewer and García 2005).