

## NORTH-EUROPEANS IN SPAIN:

*Practices of community in the context of migration, mobility and transnationalism*Erik Olsson<sup>1\*</sup>, Karen O'Reilly<sup>2#</sup>

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The focus of this special issue is the migration of North-Europeans to the Spanish coastal areas which are known to be tourist destinations. This is a kind of mobility that has been conceptualised as International Retirement Migration (e.g., King, Warnes & Williams 2000) and as Residential Tourism (e.g., Mantecón 2008), but probably most commonly as Lifestyle Migration (cf. Benson & O'Reilly 2009a, 2009b) – which is the term we will use here. The concept of lifestyle migration has been developed and widely employed as a way of thinking about mainly relatively affluent and relatively privileged forms of migration around the world. It provides a conceptual framework for thinking about the motivations behind such migrations, while also viewing migration as a process rather than a one-off move (Benson & O'Reilly 2015):

Contrary to the way many migrations are perceived, Lifestyle Migration is understood as voluntary, driven by consumption, and shaped by cultural imaginaries (Benson & Osbalidsiton 2014). Lifestyle migrants, such as Westerners in Varanasi (Korpela 2010), British in Malaysia (Green 2014), North-Europeans in Spain (Casado-Diaz 2009), or even North Americans downsizing to rural areas (Hoeys 2009), are attracted to places that are commonly believed to have specific amenities such as the weather, the physical environment, health and social services. They are also drawn by (imagined) social and cultural dimensions – a strong sense of community, a tranquil life – that imply certain ways of living that they can relate to as offering fulfilment. Lifestyle migrants are often retired, self-employed or flexible workers, and usually creative individuals able to shape new lives for themselves in their new destinations. (O'Reilly 2014 np).

Despite extensive coverage in numerous publications in the fields of Retirement Migration, Lifestyle Migration, and Residential Tourism (cf. Benson & O'Reilly 2015; Janoschka & Haas 2014 for overviews), the mobility and settlement of millions of different North

European lifestyle migrants to destinations in southern Europe is rarely discussed within the wider context of the global migrations which otherwise feature daily in mass-media and scientific reports. Yet, irrespective of the initial reason for travelling, and their obvious privilege in many instances, it is clear that lifestyle migrants are embedded and engaged in similar social processes as, for instance, labour migrants or refugees. Our goal in this special issue is to illustrate the ways in which lifestyle migrants are not only located in wider global migration trends (as discussed in Janoschka & Haas 2014 for example) but also, at the micro level, share similar 'immigrant' experiences and everyday means of coping with other kinds of migrants. As with asylum seekers, diasporic groups or even 'expatriates' in other contexts, lifestyle migrants are engaged in community-making in their new setting and they often develop transnational social relations in order to link with their networks or families in the country of origin and/or other places. So, just as Benson and O'Reilly (2015) have argued in their paper about the role of lifestyle in many migration trends, the authors of this special issue are moving away from the view of Lifestyle Migrants as a distinct category of migrant, and away from an emphasis on fluid migration forms in the context of privilege. Here, instead we focus on the human-being-ness of all migrations, the ubiquitous search for community and belonging, and the work of inhabitation (Ahmed et al 2003: 1). We also draw attention to the new structures or sedimented forms of social life that emerge from this work of inhabitation. And we also draw attention to the lack of actual privilege for some of these supposedly privileged migrants.

In this special issue, we explore the processes of settlement, belonging and home-making for Lifestyle Migrants that are evident in all migration trends (Walsh & Näre 2016). We wish to emphasise that, although Lifestyle Migrants have tended to be treated as a specific type or category of migrant, they are indeed migrants, just as refugees, asylum seekers, labour migrants, and returnee migrants are migrants. Similar processes are at play here even though the

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conditions of migration might differ. The people who moved to the coastal areas of southern Spain as permanent residents, seasonal visitors and long-stayers are as much mobile human beings as a category of Lifestyle Migrants. So, in this special issue, rather than focus on what is unique about Lifestyle Migration, we examine in depth the social life, the community makings and the everyday realities of British and Swedish lifestyle migrants as examples of global and diverse migrations. We hope the debates and empirical evidence presented here will thus contribute to a richer understanding of the processes of migration in the context of diverse conditions.

Further, having been often subjected to an emphasis on fluidity, mobility, and flux (e.g., Cohen 2015), the papers in this special issue draw more attention than previously to the sedimented practices and outcomes of these migrations. The work that the migrants put into community, belonging, routines, patterns, and means of coping and living in everyday life leads to new forms of community, new ways of living, and new sedimented practices that, in turn, shape future lives and practices (cf. O'Reilly 2012).

## British and Swedish in Southern Spain

The articles in this special issue examine processes involved in British and Swedish migration to Spain's coastal areas. Swedish and British have long been two main migrant groups of North Europeans in Spain. The phenomenon began with travellers settling in rural areas as early as the 1960s. At this time, in Andalucía, places such as Granada, Gaucín (near Ronda) and the Alpujarras saw small settlements of middle class British living amongst the rural Spanish. Also, in the early 1960s, a few of the villages in Costa Blanca, such as Torrevieja, and the newly awakened tourist resorts in Andalucía's Costa del Sol, received their first small 'colonies' of Swedish settlers.

Package tourism took off in the 1960s with Spain as the favourite destination for North Europeans for most of the 1960s and 1970s. This gave people the opportunity to see other ways of living and to imagine a new lifestyle elsewhere. Combined with longer paid holidays from work, increases in expendable wealth, rising property prices in northern Europe, people started to realise they could extend tourism into something more (semi-)permanent by buying a second home in Spain. Residential tourism really started to take a hold in Spain during the 1980s, by which time many North Europeans had settled there more permanently as retirees, and had later been joined by family members and friends and others who had visited the area as tourists and had seen the possibilities of making a life there by providing goods and services to the settled North Europeans.

This history of migration to the Spanish coastal areas is covered in greater detail elsewhere (e.g., O'Reilly 2000 2012) and it is not our aim to revisit it here; instead each author gives their piece of the history in respective articles. The point we wish to make here is that migration to Spain's coastal areas became, and remains, a mass phenomenon with very important and profound local and long-term effects. For the British, for example, there were an estimated million British home-owners and 750,000 British people living full-time in Spain by 2005 (Sriskandarajah & Drew 2006). This made them Spain's largest migrant group for most of the last two decades. Of course, since then, we have had the global financial crisis and there has been some return migration and fewer new migrants moving there in recent years (Huete, Mantecón & Estévez 2013), and we don't know yet the impact of 'Brexit' for the British migration to Spain. However, it is clear that this is still an important migration:

if we examine entries and departures of the British nationals together, we find that for every 100 British citizens that arrived in Spain in 2005, two left, whereas in 2010 there were 70 departures for every 100 entries. The balance is still positive, but it is clear that the situation has changed. (Huete, Mantecón & Estévez 2013: 342)

Similarly, Swedish migration to these coastal areas has constantly increased since the 1980s, and seemingly without any serious ruptures. In 2015, the number of Swedish citizens living in Spain was estimated to exceed 90,000 people (SVIV 2015), the vast majority of whom reside in the coastal regions. Despite evidence of a return migration from both these cases, nevertheless, this migration has now become a long-term phenomenon and, as Erik Olsson (2017) points out in his article, this is visible not only in the large number of addresses on houses and apartments but also in the numerous shops, restaurants, cafés, clinics, service installations and companies that market themselves as national establishments.

## Liquid modernity, and the super-diversity of North-European migration to Spain

A point of departure in this issue is that migration, as societal phenomenon in general, tends to be more complex, even super-diverse (Vertovec 2007) in times of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman 2000, 2001, 2007). A significant marker of liquid times is when people seem to be liberated from lifelong commitments, both in jobs and relationships, free to carve out their own future trajectories without consideration to closeness of family, consistency in work and so on. Bauman (2007) argues that we can do this where we like, and as we wish. In liquid modernity, utopian dreams are privatised, a personal matter. Because liquid modernity is marked also by insecurities and fear for the future, we now seek to satisfy our dreams through instant gratification rather than attempt long-term plans. Contemporary utopias, then, are hunted for by individuals rather than socially created (Bauman 2007). Indeed, in liquid modernity we are 'individuals by decree', and have no choice but to seek out, or hunt, our own personal, privatised 'good life', perhaps through migration to spaces which offer the 'goods' we seek (O'Reilly 2009: 103). 'Liquid migration' then is a mobility that could be characterised as of 'temporary, fluid and uncertain nature' (Engbersen, Snel & de Boom 2010: 137).

Spain and the other countries in western and northern Europe are – because of an increasing ethnic and mobility mix – better characterized by, as Vertovec (2007) contends, 'super-diversity' rather than 'multiculturalism', or even simple diversity; terms which attempted to capture the relationship between a few large ethnic minority, immigrant groups and homogenous groups of 'locals'. With this notion, Vertovec highlights a similar complexity to what we are referring to here as 'a condition [which] is distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade' (Vertovec 2007: 1024). This is particularly notable in some of the coastal areas in Spain in localities where hundreds of nationalities live 'side-by-side' in complex patterns of settlement. A consequence of the liquidity of this migration is that many of these (however affluent or resourceful) live with an uncertain economic, social, and political migrant status and with no immediate satisfactory provision of medical and care facilities.

## Making sense of life as a liquid lifestyle migrant

All articles in this special issue examine the migration and settlement of migrants from United Kingdom and Sweden in southern Spain. We wish to emphasise that, although different in motives, social background and daily practices of migration, these migrants are in many ways like any other migrants in totally different situations. These North-European lifestyle migrants are escaping to, what they believe will be, a 'good life' in a new country (O'Reilly & Benson 2009). As newcomers, they will in most cases be seeking a 'new' or 'second' home; their practices of belonging will often refer to their nation or ethnic group and they will be engaged in and exposed to different kinds of social practices, which in different ways will intervene in their lives as migrants. But it is also our aim in this issue to reflect the diversity of the migrants we examine in the sense of their specific mobility practices, their age groups, their motivations for migrating, and their practices for making a life in these areas.

In this special issue, for Karen O'Reilly (2017) the focus is more on settled, or what we might call permanent, migrants and she is interested in their settlement practices, their attempts to find belonging, or their reasons for leaving. Her interests lie in the sediments and traces left by permanent migration of people of all ages; traces that will in turn shape migration for future migrants and for those who remain. Erik Olsson also looks at a similar diversity in the Swedish networks in southern Spain. Although these migrants tend to be of an 'older age', Olsson reminds us there are 'all kinds of people' – not only retired migrants – moving there and above all, there are no reasons to assume that these migrants will automatically seek the company of the others in a Swedish community. Simply speaking, a community needs community-making practices in order to be realised as a community. The diversity of the migrant group lends itself to complex analysis; in this case of how the social clubs mobilise the individuals in the networks for a community-life and how they shape the experience and the form of home they thus offer. Anna Gavanas' (2017) and Caroline Oliver's (2017) articles, alternatively, look at retired migrants. Oliver aims to understand how care practices among British peer groups operate in 'liquid times', and how these practices in turn both constitute and express community. Gavanas instead explores the diverse and patchwork, local and transnational, formal and informal, means of care and support available for retired Swedish migrants. She shows how ageing migrants mitigate the effects of such patchwork provision through a moral economy of care that make increasing international gaps and inequalities more manageable, while creating coping strategies in the face of neoliberal market logic. In both these cases, older people are helping themselves and helping each other, by drawing on community, belonging, nation, and morality, but the results are care and support that is less than reliable or adequate.

In her article on Swedish migrants in the Costa del Sol, Annie Woube (2017) discusses the practices and experiences of community formation as told in the narratives of her informants. Woube reminds us of the fluidity of North-European migration to Spain, and problematizes processes of belonging, safety and security. She particularly draws attention to how migrants position themselves in relation to their old country, their new country, and to diverse groups of migrants they spend time with. Here social class, gender, age, and nationality intersect with the local and transnational frames of reference for finding 'a place'. Finally, the British caravan-dwellers discussed in Hege H. Leivestad's (2017) article are an example of the complex diversity of lifestyle migration in Spain. Leivestad also reminds us of how social networks provide important support in

daily life, while she at the same time demonstrates how a mobile life (in a mobile home) is made immobile, settled, and neighbourly.

## Daily practices of home and community making in liquid times

A large share of the discussion in this special issue emphasises daily practices, routines, or 'the work of inhabitation' (Ahmed et al., 2003:1). Here the focus is not on home as a fixed entity or place, but on how post-migration 're-groundings' are enacted, materially and symbolically. We can for instance see in Leivestad's article how the mobile home and the campsite become sites for collective sociality, for the production of locality tinged with nostalgia of a bygone Britain, with its working men's clubs, and sense of neighbourhood. Here, those who cannot afford many of the material luxuries of the good life manage to locate their own version within their mobile dwellings, by materially shaping the environment (a fluffy rug, locally-purchased antiques, etc.). They locate themselves economically by engaging in 'do-it-yourself' practices, for themselves and for others, working for cash-in-hand, organising the rental businesses of other caravan-dwellers, and numerous other economic activities that earn them enough to afford to live where they want to live. And socially they locate their belonging by using their skills, adapting their environments, and establishing networks that deliver neighbourliness reminiscent of English village life (see also Leivestad 2015).

Similar to what we might see in many other studies of migrants' lives, the campsite-migrants come to rely increasingly on their local neighbours and friends as they age. This is evident also in the contributions by Gavanas and Oliver. The Swedish retirees in Gavanas' study see home as a place of safety and security in older age. However, many of them expect that there will come a time when they will return to Sweden as home. Swedish society is often accounted for in terms of the final, safe(r) and secure 'home', which stands in contrast to the home built on a patchwork of unreliable provision from the Spanish system and the entrepreneurial or caring activities of one's compatriots. What is interesting to note here is the sense of expectation or the moral duty to care for others of one's nationality, and the disappointment when this is not adequate. Helping each other out both reflects and provides a sense of community and belonging (with others), but as we also see in Oliver's article, this urgent search for community in the face of fragmentation (Bauman 2000) can be inadequate as a safety net. Wearing community as a light cloak rather than an iron cage (Bauman 2000) means it can be cast off much more lightly. Communities constructed and solidified through care practices involve constant mediation and negotiation, and still they have their limitations and boundaries. As has been shown in studies of social capital (e.g., Casado-Díaz 2009), communities based on needs and support, while being inclusive, are always also thus exclusive: for every 'us' there is a 'them'.

In Olsson's article, it is the social clubs that provide a sense of home – or second home – for their would-be members; but it is the kind of home that is especially interesting here. Olsson shows how Swedishness is produced and remembered, re-enacted, and reshaped in the social clubs' activities. Traditional Swedish festivities and traditions are used as vehicles for community-life by recalling and celebrating these in the Spanish context. This is accomplished with more accentuation than they probably would be in the migrants' life in Sweden and at times corresponding more with the 'migration cycle' of the seasonally visiting migrants than their traditional celebration calendar. Other social activities (visiting local attractions and sites,

physical activities such as golf or petanca), while ostensibly 'social' are also about enabling Swedish migrants to feel at home, of being included in an 'exclusive' society. Through these kinds of practices, the members of social clubs will engage in defining a sense of belonging and identification for Swedish in southern Spain, which includes creating a space for the performance and creation of ethnic identity (cf. Fortier 2006: 63).

In O'Reilly's article, the term 'home' is used to refer to the United Kingdom, but also as a sense that people aspire to – a sense of home and belonging. She argues that: 'Where migration has left little space for belonging within the majority community, migrants both seek and perform it elsewhere'. For some, the UK is the home they have returned to after the financial crisis. But those who have remained in Spain seek home, community and belonging locally through their compatriots. As shown in Olsson's study, ethnic intimacy is located in the social clubs, networks and other organizations that migrants engage in as part of their daily practices. This is an intimacy that reminds them who they are and who they were, but it is not necessarily an exclusive way of locating home in a foreign land. Rather, we can see a sort of integration here amongst the routines, practices, coping mechanisms, and institutions, in which the migrants have learned to live comfortably alongside the majority community while still finding a place (a home) for themselves.

For the Swedish migrants in Woube's article, home is sought as a way of dealing with economic and social needs (help finding a job, or help dealing with practical issues), but it is also about finding a home amongst others. Both Woube and Olsson speak about a Swedish infrastructure that functions as a comfort and a security when living in a foreign country. The different networks, organizations, clubs and practices in which people could communicate in Swedish, celebrating Swedish festivities, and helping each other with practical issues – even to find employment – are related to the sharing of a community with other Swedes (in Spain). Woube argues that the sense of sameness and comfort that are created in this infrastructure resembles what Vertovec and Cohen (1999) have identified as a key component of diaspora. Also, as Olsson points out, much of the practices employed by the actors in this infrastructure are related to the community-making and is in fact also shaping the community in a specific direction (cf. Sökefeld 2006).

For Woube and Olsson, it is diasporic practices that shape internal collectivities, in the context of flexible and/or seasonally based mobilities. Woube holds that these diasporic practices, based on sharing experiences of migration, express and manifest a kind of collective identification and loyalty in reference to a shared distant origin, in this case Sweden. Leivestad's study looks at practices of home-making and economic practices that enable those who are less financially stable to maintain their imagined and desired migrant lifestyle. The emphasis in her paper, as well, on very practical and applied material practices of do-it-yourself home-making draw our attention to the constant life making or 'work of inhabitation' (Ahmed et al 2003: 1). These aspects are in particular accentuated in Oliver's and Gavanas' articles which are looking carefully at caring practices. They draw our attention to how such practices are framed by moral and normative frames, motivated by emotions as well as by fears for our own futures. For instance, Gavanas shows how moral norms and sentiments structure and influence economic practices, both formal and informal. In Gavanas', Olsson's and O'Reilly's articles, we see how practices become shaped into institutional and more-or-less formal arrangements.

Broadly speaking, these home and community-making practices give birth to some of the arrangements which are filling the gaps of

the welfare states. The emerging structure of arrangements which are serving lifestyle migrants in Southern Spain is in some sense a response to the liquidity and super-diversity of this form of migration. Individuals who are feeling insecure and are seeking some kind of safety-net of caring or support – however often insufficient – are also those who are likely to respond positively to these attempts of home and community-making (cf. Reynolds & Zontini 2014).

## Nation and lifestyle migration

Migrants in these articles are posited as actors who shape their own destinies in the context of constraints, imaginaries, markets, and other social and economic structures (cf. O'Reilly 2012). One such structure, which both shapes and is shaped by migration, is nationality and the nation state as fact, figure, and identity. National belonging and the right to passports, visas, entry, exit, and residence, frames all migrations in the contemporary world. This is certainly the case for those discussed in this special issue: freedom of movement within Europe applies to those who live in member states of the European Union, so nationality here actually permits the movement, frames its shape (by offering constraints and freedoms in the form of visas and permits), and in this sense, also makes migration a possible practice. North-Europeans are thus able to view migration and mobility as a self-realisation project in a way not always available to other migrants around the world – at least not when they have desires to cross the borders of the European Union.

However much these migrants might create and perform home in Spain, the home nation also features in their lives and stories as a safety-net – somewhere one can return to if all else fails, and also somewhere one will be looked after. The Swedish migrants in Woube's study not only refer to the possibility of return, but the 'right to return'. Many of the migrants in these papers return to their home nation regularly, to see family and friends, to sort out financial and legal issues, or to address health concerns, or even in some cases, to earn money to fund their mobility. Here, Olsson demonstrates how the clubs (and other organisations) are a part of the infrastructure that enable and promote such transnational engagements. The significance of such infrastructure from the migrants' point of view is also salient in the case of the British migrants in Oliver's article, as they are fraudulently claiming UK benefits. Migrants who returned to the UK also seem to constantly compare UK and Spanish health provision in their assessment of the latter. The nation-state is always there as the crutch or security blanket, and the identification with the nation is also often marked with privilege. For example, in Woube's account, the migrants are aware of the status of Sweden as a country with, as they see it, a more developed welfare system, and thus, of themselves as privileged migrants.

Nation also features as sediments and traces of migration, as both Olsson and O'Reilly point out. In Spain now, there is an emerging space of Swedish and British social life with newspapers, clubs, restaurant and bars, shops, and with churches, schools and other organisations and associations that not only create spaces for the performance of nation but overtly labelled as of that nation. Nation is thus performed, remembered, recreated, and reshaped, in the search for belonging and in the work of inhabitation, as accentuated in Olsson's article. However, this happens despite the fact that these putative 'nation' spaces also include individuals of other nationalities who visit and consume in these facilities. The British pubs and Swedish design shops – symbols for a Britishness or Swedishness globally – are examples of how people from all nationalities can find

themselves contributing to the reproduction of nationalities without necessarily identifying with or belonging to them. Someone running a British club or buying Swedish clothes may not necessarily be British or Swedish themselves, but they nevertheless take part in the social construction of Britishness and Swedishness.

## Lifestyle migration, community making and liquid times

To summarise, the articles in this special issue are presenting what we see as the sediments, the more settled, routine, practiced, structuring forms of a mass-phenomenon in contemporary Europe, which is often neglected in the mainstream migration literature. We are, in this special issue, discussing examples of how the (assumed) 'privileged' migrants from Northern Europe with a backdrop of liquidity and fluidity of mobility, can experience insecurity, lack of daily routines, 'homesickness' and longing for a meaningful social life. The articles in this special issue are outlining a human being-ness, which we think is crucial in all forms of migration: community-making, establishment of networks, strategies for everyday survival, home and nation-making

feature as processes in all migration projects. This does, of course, not exclude that the migrants in this special issue are also seeking an amenity which, basically, is probably characteristic of the human being but not so readily available for all.

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