

## THE GUIDE TO COMFORT

*The diasporic practices of Swedish clubs in Southern Spain***Abstract**

This article demonstrates how large social clubs are operating at the locus of an ethnic community-making of Swedish migrants in Southern Spain. The clubs are selectively targeting the relatively wealthy (ethnic) Swedish individuals of older age, offering them a home-like social arena 'in Swedish' in which the mediation of information and services is just one of the 'guidelines' the clubs offer to ensure the members a comfortable lifestyle in Spain. In this social space, the Swedish migrants meet, socialise and, to some extent, also consume, rather than participating and integrating in Spanish society. The article argues that the practices used by the social clubs are becoming part of the infrastructure guiding migrants towards a Swedish diasporic lifestyle in Southern Spain.

**Keywords**

Lifestyle migration • transnationalism • diaspora • community-making • Swedish migration • Southern Spain

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**1 Introduction**

Since the early 1960s, Spain has been one of the largest destination countries for Swedish migrants. Any visitor to the Costa del Sol or Costa Blanca – the coastal areas where most Swedish migrants have settled – will recognise the large number of Swedish names on houses and apartments and the numerous shops, restaurants, cafés, clinics, service installations and companies which market themselves as Swedish or Scandinavian.<sup>1</sup> These are 'sediments' (O'Reilly 2017) of what I depict as a Swedish social space which has its origins in the settlement and social lives of the networks of Swedish pensioners, entrepreneurs, students and families who moved to this part of Spain.

Swedish migration to these Spanish coastal areas is, to a great extent, a good example of what is often portrayed as 'lifestyle migration' (e.g. Benson & O'Reilly 2009; Benson & Osbaldiston 2014; O'Reilly & Benson 2009). Visitors can observe that most Swedes whom they come across in public and in Swedish churches and clubs resemble 'clear-cut' Swedish individuals of an older age. At least on the outside, this confirms the Swedish media image of the migrants as a colony of retired people mostly interacting with each other in Swedish without much concern for Spain.<sup>2</sup> Although many of the Swedish migrants in the public life are senior citizens, they are not a homogeneous group. Retirees are not the only migrants moving to Southern Spain.<sup>3</sup> Some have moved for work or business, others for family reasons and young people as students. In addition a significant

proportion of migrants from Sweden have previous immigration experience in Sweden.<sup>4</sup> We should, therefore, not assume that any form of community amongst them is something 'natural', but there are at least significant age, class and even ethnic variations within these networks. What many of the Swedish migrants have in common, however, is that, in most cases, they are immigrants of one sort or another in Spain. The majority of these migrants have limited knowledge of the Spanish language and will encounter a number of unfamiliar realities which require language skills and 'know-how'. At the same time, they will also come into contact with agencies, neighbourhood associations, service-providers, bars and restaurants which, although situated in Spanish society, have more of an international flavour (O'Reilly 2000) than a Spanish one and, in many cases, are also located in the Swedish social space mentioned earlier (Lundström 2014).

The attempts at and initiatives for community-making amongst the networks of Swedish migrants in Southern Spain are the main focus of this article. More specifically, I discuss how some of the large social associations and organisations are establishing themselves for that very purpose and also the kind of 'collective vehicles' (Sökefeld 2006: 269) they are using to mobilise people. In examining this, I relocate my focus to the practices used by these associations or social clubs and how they shape the social lives of the migrants. More precisely, this means describing the activities which offer the migrants not only the feeling of being in a home-like environment – a 'classic' way of creating community feelings which takes ethnicity as

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a point of departure (e.g. Auerbach 1991; Gans 1979; Sanjek 1992; Sollors 1989; Tallgren 1999) – but also services which compensate for their lack of knowledge of Spanish society and language. I argue that these attempts to mobilise the (imagined) Swedish community are part of a larger process based on a particular notion of Swedish ethnicity and the migrants' preference for a comfortable lifestyle.

Lifestyle migration refers to the migration of 'relatively affluent individuals, moving either part-time or full-time, permanently or temporarily, to places which, for various reasons, signify for the migrants something loosely defined as quality of life' (Benson & O'Reilly 2009: 621). Here, the initial mobility of individuals becomes an 'escape' to green(-er) pastures with an expected return to the country of origin or onward move when the time comes (Benson & Osbaldiston 2014). However, whether migrants live in the country of destination temporarily or for their lifetime (also sometimes the case for 'lifestyle migrants'), I argue here that their social engagements often generate different social structures that not only reproduce but also develop in new forms. The analytical focus in this article is based on this observation, and in the following pages, I look closer into the making of a Swedish community in Southern Spain as a diasporic process (cf. Brubaker 2005; Faist 2010; Sökefeld 2006). The main argument in this article is that this diasporic community-making is grounded on the expectations and assumptions of particular lifestyle characteristics.

## 2 Approaching a lifestyle diaspora

This article draws on several periods of ethnographic fieldwork on the Costa Blanca and Costa del Sol during 2010–2014, which comprised informal visits, observations and attendance at activities and meetings at various social clubs. I also recorded interviews with 53 individuals and had more frequent contacts with 10 'key informants' with whom I discussed different aspects of my research. Most of my interlocutors were volunteers and board members of Swedish associations and organisations, whilst others were entrepreneurs or individuals who were known in Swedish networks. These individuals were approached as they are taking initiatives, setting up practices and providing advice which is shaping the activities on offer in the clubs in different directions. The ethnography provided me with insights into the perspectives of these community-making people. One aspect of their narratives concerned implicit assumptions about who they, as community activists and leaders, were representing, what practices they were trying to install amongst the Swedish networks of migrants in Spain and in which direction they wanted to take these. These assumptions prompted a number of questions that I seek to answer here and which, in a general sense, reverted back to the relationship between 'the people' in the networks and the organisations which claimed to represent them as Swedish.

The picture emerging from these interviews visualises the need for a community and support which corresponds well with what Bauman (2000, 2001) recognises in the word 'liquid modernity'. Similar to many other lifestyle migrants, the Swedes seem to be embedded in a self-fulfilling project of seeking a better life (Benson & Osbaldiston 2014; O'Reilly 2000; O'Reilly & Benson 2009) in Spain, with its better climate and healthier and more relaxed lifestyle than in Sweden. At the same time, this project often takes them into a more uncertain world of language problems, especially as they have their families, social networks and primary social security systems a long distance away. Although lifestyle migrants are often considered as privileged, they also often find themselves in a position where

they are without the necessary skills or support from the authorities to negotiate their everyday reality. As Oliver (2017) suggests, this image depicts individuals as, in a sense, 'fragmented', which made it natural for my interlocutors to seek and reassert community as a means of finding a safe harbour.

These ethnographic insights led me to look at the clubs' activity agendas and how the direction the clubs should take was articulated in their repertoires, on the associations' websites and in their magazines and other published materials. These sources of information are treated as an ongoing communication in the wider sense of the word – a 'discourse' (here understood as an expression of boundaries, content and direction) in which the clubs are positioning themselves as representatives of the Swedish networks and as guides for migrants in Spain. Via this discourse the clubs manifest themselves to the outside world, informing migrants which segment in the networks the clubs are representing and what they intend to do for this segment.

With this focus on community-making in a migration context, my analysis is linked to the concept of *diaspora* – a term commonly used for the displacement of 'people' and 'expatriate minority communities' (Safran 1991: 83; cf. Cohen 1997; Vertovec & Cohen 1999). The commonly used criteria for speaking about diasporas in migration studies are summarised by Rogers Brubaker (2005) as 'dispersion', 'homeland orientation' and 'boundary maintenance' (i.e. ethnicity or other group claims). The notion of 'community' is central to diaspora formation; however, I do not claim here that the Swedish migrants in Southern Spain constitute one single community of (dispersed) ethnic Swedes. Strong critics of the concept have, for instance, questioned whether diaspora is a social unit that always, and in all situations, refers to a consistent and bounded social group with ethnic connotations and that this community is always looking to their (own or ancestral) 'homeland' (e.g. Anthias 1998; Brah 1996; Brubaker 2005; Clifford 1994; Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk 2005). Taking this criticism seriously, I follow Brubaker's suggestion of thinking of diaspora as 'a category of practice' and a 'way of formulating the identities and loyalties of a population' (Brubaker 2005: 12). As a consequence, communities are empirically driven social forms – the desired goal of mobilisations, which are contested as soon as they are claimed to exist. Instead of assuming that people become members of a diasporic community in spite of their presumed origin in a specific country or region, the focus should be on how communities with this 'expatriate' quality are generated and become socially constituted by different practices (Faist 2010: 17). However, this does not deny that the image of a homeland is celebrated in many diasporic movements and that the practices embrace an engagement to this country of origin by many migrants, for whom a return or relocation to this region is the ultimate goal (Faist 2010; King & Olsson 2014; Tsuda 2009).

With this practice-oriented approach, diasporic community-making involves the mobilisation of 'expatriate' people 'for collective purposes and actions' (Sökefeld 2006: 268). The successful mobilisation of diasporas (i.e. created groups or communities) requires 'political opportunities' for so doing – 'mobilising structures and practices' and 'framing' (Sökefeld 2006: 269). In this article, however, I do not consider the first condition for this mobilisation, which refers to enabling structures in Spanish society – as, for instance, the possibility to start associations and organise ethnic clubs and the freedom to express 'ethnic culture'. My focus is mainly on the structures and practices which become vehicles for this mobilisation. I thus look closely at the arenas which gather and organise Swedish migrants – in this case, the social clubs – and to the practices employed when shaping these gatherings to the needs

of a group of Swedes. To account for the content and quality in this and the 'ethos' it evokes, I also consider the third (of Sökefeld's) condition(s) – the 'framing'.

### 3 Swedish networks in Southern Spain: a migration history

Swedish migration to Southern Spain has its origin in the marketing of charter tours and mass tourism in the 1960s. In subsequent years, the Costa Blanca and Costa del Sol became favourite coastal destinations for Swedes who were looking for a more permanent residence there. This migration has continued uninterrupted, and estate agencies still report a booming market. Several thousand Swedes now live there permanently, and an even greater number owns a house for seasonal or short-term use. In addition, an unknown number regularly visit the area, renting a house and staying for longer periods every year. A common pattern for migrants is to live in Spain from late September until the arrival of the Swedish spring in April. As travel between Sweden and Spain is easy and relatively inexpensive, it is not uncommon for migrants to return to Sweden for short visits – for instance, to attend a family event or see a doctor.

Many of the Swedish migrants maintain their living and social arrangements in Swedish society even when staying abroad for several months (cf. Gustafson 2009; Woube 2014). For instance, I met a few people during my fieldwork who invested in the Swedish stock-market by actively making their transactions from their Spanish location. Reading Swedish newspapers, watching Swedish television, making frequent phone calls and remaining in contact with Swedish society are part of the daily routine for many. Although this seems to be the dominant living pattern amongst Swedish migrants in Spain, many live permanently or for most of the year without having much contact with Sweden.

The settlement of Swedes in these areas has opened up opportunities for an expanding market of service-providers, who specifically target Scandinavian migrants (Börestam 2011). There is also a rapidly growing web of information circulation, for example, through magazines and websites, and significant civic engagements within the networks which offer support and self-help (Gavanas 2017). Most migrants, at some point in their journey, need information on registering their stay in order to ensure their safety and deal with Spanish bureaucracy – for instance, when purchasing a property or when legalising a will. When they need medical treatment, they also need to be aware of the country's social insurance regulations and, as many are unfamiliar with Spanish bureaucracy and speak little Spanish, they need help. The reality of their situation may be one important reason why so many seem to enjoy the company of other Swedes and seek opportunities to socialise in situations where they can speak entirely in Swedish, at the same time, having access to a supportive social environment (Gavanas 2017; Lundström 2014; cf. Oliver 2017; Woube 2014). In the following sections, I show how social associations are responding to these conditions in their attempts to mobilise interest amongst the Swedish migrant networks. However, although thousands of people are members of these clubs, the majority of all Swedish migrants in Spain still choose to stay outside the dedicated club life. My intention here is not to account for the general situation of Swedish migrants but, rather, to examine the mechanisms built into community-making among them (as expressed in their social associations) and the direction in which this mobilisation is taking them.

### 4 The social associations

Some Scandinavian social associations in these coastal areas have been active in Swedish networks since the late 1960s. Almost fifty years later, there are dozens of associations and networks operating as social clubs – several of them founded in the 1980s – with the main purpose of providing a social arena for Swedes (and other Scandinavians) living there. Most small-scale Swedish social associations and networks were founded in response to requests from individuals and families seeking to meet and socialise, share common interests and find solutions to common problems. However, there are also several much larger associations – with hundreds or even thousands of members – which, rather than being simply a social meeting-place, have extended their repertoire to encompass a much greater range of activities and event. As these are also the most significant actors in community-making, my discussion here will essentially cover the practices of these large associations.

Although most Swedish associations in Southern Spain were founded in response to the types of request mentioned above, there were also a few 'top-down' initiatives whereby an association was set up by another organisation or company. The largest of the social associations for Swedes in Spain (in fact globally, they claim) started as an initiative taken by a housing agency. In an interview with Gustav<sup>5</sup>, a well-known entrepreneur in the Costa Blanca area, we talked about his experiences of the Swedish community there. Gustav recalled the days when many of the Swedish customers (as he saw it) bought their houses without access to proper information and without much forward planning:

We became more like a social office instead of an estate agency. We took care of too many everyday practicalities to be functional. Then I got the idea of starting the [name of the association]. I read a book about retired people and how much unused knowledge they carry with them, and this was useful, as they could help us with selling as the home-owners would come to our exhibitions. But here [this association] could help in taking care of the newcomers, for a small fee. We were creating a structure which separated the existing home-owners and the newly arrived owners. (Interview with Gustav, March 2011)

In Gustav's account, the association was an entrepreneurial response that would support their customers but have no negative impact on business. This association later became a members-only social club providing an arena for *all* Swedes (and Scandinavians) in the area. According to the club's official statistics, membership had increased to more than 7,500 families by 2015 and had an annual turnover of more than €1.5 million.<sup>6</sup> Also other entrepreneurs in the area expressed a similar interest in supporting the migrants in community issues but, as the example above indicates, this interest often overlaps with an interest in doing good business (Börestam 2011).

When associations grow, they have to register as such, implying stricter forms of responsibility for management, economic accounting, auditing and so on. These are managed by a board where the quite extensive duties of running the association fall mainly to the chair and treasurer. There are many reasons why individuals aspire to positions on the boards of these large associations but one is certainly the access to power. For O'Reilly (2000), this gives them a status which, in a sense, replaces that which they lost in migrating. This makes sense as some associations have been able to convert their income from membership fees and sponsorship – mainly by Swedish entrepreneurs in the area – into power and influence; in other words,

the clubs become important players in the various networks, which are fundamental to the potential Swedish community. The leaders of clubs with aspirations to become important also need a strategy for recruiting new members through an interesting agenda and the scope for developing their range of activities in new directions.

#### 4.1 The 'social' social club

The provision of a ready-made social life is what people in the Swedish networks in Southern Spain normally expect from the social associations. This is also reflected in the way the larger associations perform as clubs by providing a meeting-place for their members. In the club-house, visitors have access to information about events, addresses of important services and daily Swedish newspapers. Some of the clubs also provide a library where members can borrow literature in the Swedish language and a cafeteria where they can have a coffee and a light Swedish-style meal with friends. Some clubs also offer free Internet access and show Swedish television programmes. Club volunteers often mentioned the urgent need for a social life amongst the Swedes in the area, especially those who are lonely due to the loss of their partner. In this way, the clubs make a great effort to provide a familiar and home-like environment for their (potential) members (Grassman & Larsson 2012).

The clubs are not expressly presented as associations for retired Swedes; however, in reality, this is not far from being the case. Most of the club members are in their late middle age or older and almost exclusively communicate in Swedish, whether with staff, volunteers or other visitors. Official statistics and my own fieldwork data, however, speak of a greater variation of Swedish migrants in these coastal areas. When I spoke to club activists about the domination of senior citizens in the clubs, I noticed that the question surprised them. Generally, the response was defensive, claiming, for instance, that the 'young' ones never expressed any interest in club activities but that, if they wished to come, they should just show up. Hanna, a very experienced and influential club-activist in Costa del Sol, did not even understand my question; after repeating it several times in different ways, she finally understood and replied that 'Most of the people living here are retired and elderly anyway ... so, well ... one has to say, well, there are not many active people, or those who are working, who will come' (Hanna, March 2013). The most obvious reason for the dominance of senior individuals is, in my opinion, a consequence of how the clubs organise and present their activities. For instance, most people of working age, students and children have fewer possibilities to visit the clubs during opening hours and many of the events have not been planned to fit with those who are working or who have commitments during the day – that is, the organisers are framing the clubs' activities in ways which appeal to certain segments of the migrant population but less to others.

The most popular club events are probably the parties, pub evenings and celebrations of traditional Swedish festivities. Such events make the club the social arena they are aiming to be and are also a good way to attract new members. Other examples of popular activities with a similar social function are excursions to distant and neighbouring attractions in Spain (often accompanied by a guide), visits to a local bodega or a theatre, trekking in the nearby hills and classes in particular dancing styles. To the popular social activities, we must add games such as bridge, chess and bingo and mental training in the form of yoga and mindfulness classes. Two remarkably popular activities in the Swedish networks seem to be golf and boules (*petanca*). These activities are significantly highlighted as

'social' in clubs' repertoires; the large clubs have special sections for these activities and try to obtain discounts on the costly green fees for their members. Note, however, that some activities rely heavily on traditional Swedish habits and manners. Further education courses and training have been important dimensions in the non-formal educational ambitions of the Swedish democratic development since the early twentieth century (see Studieförbunden, 2015).

These club-organised festivities are a good illustration of how the clubs relate to the image of Swedish traditions in order to guarantee a good response from (potential) members. For some popular festivities, the clubs normally release a limited number of tickets which, for a fixed price, include a seat at the table, a meal and drinks. These kinds of festivity – such as Christian services at Easter and Christmas and Swedish folklore – are extremely popular and the tickets often sell out in the first few days. Anyone who has attended a similar expat event abroad – at least amongst Swedes – will know the kind of atmosphere to which I refer here: much toasting, singing (often traditional Swedish folk and drinking songs) and dancing.

These popular traditional festivities are not always held at the same time as the corresponding feast in Sweden but are, nevertheless, often framed as a kind of traditional celebration. One example is the party celebrating the seasonal start of the tradition of cray-fishing (*kräftpremiär*). Another example is the – mainly southern Swedish – tradition of celebrating St Martin's Day (*Mårten gås*) on 10th of November, whereby goose in different forms is served for dinner. A third example is the party following the annual release of new boxes of fermented herring (*surströmmingspremiär*), a tradition in which a somewhat exclusive dinner, because of the strong smell for which the dish is famous in Sweden, will be limited to private companies and mostly also associated with inhabitants from Northern Sweden. These traditions become somewhat exotic in the Spanish context and are perhaps why their celebration in Spain is so popular (cf. Tallgren 1999).

These celebrations of popular tradition in the Swedish society engage migrants in a social context where the sense of being Swedish and of being Swedish *abroad* are the focus, as the events include at least some elements of an imagined Swedish tradition that reminds the participants of 'who we are' (cf. Fortier 2006). Through the exotic nature of the events, they become something for insiders only. Drawing on Kathleen Conzen's (1989) analysis of 'festive culture' amongst the early German immigrants in the United States, we can, perhaps, assume that these Swedish cultural traditions will be more appealing to some segments of the population but less welcoming for other categories. The festivities are probably more familiar to individuals of the older generation than to the young; immigrants to Sweden (including those from other Nordic countries) are, in most cases, likely to be less enthusiastic about the ritualised celebration involved in, for instance, the fermented herring party.

#### 4.2 The 'useful' social club

When I became Chair I made it clear that we should combine the useful with the pleasurable. The useful stuff has to do with healthcare, finding apartments, dealing with housing and so on. We are mediating contacts and providing interpretation services. And then we have the pleasurable stuff (of course)! We hold good conversations and allow people to experience more culture. (Interview with Hans, November 2011)

As the Chair of a large association on the Costa Blanca, Hans in this interview explains his vision for the association and how it should serve

its members. This replicates developments I have witnessed in the large social associations for Swedes in Spain, which are no longer exclusively social arenas, but have expanded their activity repertoire to now offer more practical support services, designed to enable a comfortable life without knowledge of the Spanish language and society.

Much of the practical support which the clubs offer is information. For instance, two of the largest social associations on the Costa Blanca publish their periodical magazine, which contains articles, columns, association news and facts as well as briefings and notices about Spanish society and the Swedish space in the region. In each issue, readers also find useful information on practical matters such as the Spanish tax system or the rules governing property-ownership. In addition, these magazines are filled with advertisements placed mostly by companies operating in the Swedish–Scandinavian space – useful for those looking for a particular establishment or product. One of these magazines is a giant, with each edition sent to more than 15,000 members on the Costa Blanca as well as to addresses in Scandinavian countries. The publishing and distribution of these magazines is expensive and associations are clearly dependent on the patronage of advertisers and sponsors. Some of the estate and legal agencies have stepped in as sponsors and advertise frequently in the magazines, even, occasionally, as the authors of informative articles (e.g. legal consultants writing about a new tax regulation).

The associations' websites are their social window and contain much useful information. One very intriguing example of how the clubs try to support people in their everyday struggle with living in Spain is the website of one of the largest associations. At a tab on the website called *Bra att veta* (Good To Know), the club provides basic information on tax regulations, pension rules for those living in Sweden and Spain simultaneously, healthcare and practical information believed to be useful to Swedish residents in Spain. For example, under the rubric *Nio-nummer*<sup>7</sup> the club publishes information on the obligation for migrants to apply for a personal identification number (NIE) on taking up foreign residency in Spain:

Everyone who buys an apartment or a villa or is living for some time in Spain needs a nine-number [*Sic!*]. Whatever one is doing, this nine-number is requested. If you are purchasing a car or are doing up your accommodation, the first question is nine-number. You get one by visiting the local police, taking your passport with you.

Despite the somewhat confusing terminology in this information, this is valuable information for those who are staying in Spain for longer periods of time. Another example is under the rubric *'Ambassad och konsulat i Spanien'* [Embassy and consulate in Spain]. Here, all retirees are advised to contact the consulate and obtain a certificate confirming that they are alive (!) as those 'living outside Sweden and receiving age-related pensions, sick- or activity compensation, survivors' pensions or occupational injury annuities from *Försäkringskassan* [the Swedish Social Insurance Agency] each year must prove that they are alive'. The club also advises readers to renew their passports in Sweden as trying to do this in Spain is considered to be very complicated. This information is useful for Swedish citizens but probably less so for other citizens as it is only the Swedish legations in Madrid and Malaga are mentioned. The taken-for-granted reference to Sweden and Swedish origins in this example is remarkable as the club, according to its statutes and its name, carries a clear Nordic connection.

The larger clubs regularly organise information events for their members, often relaxed occasions on which experts or

representatives of companies are invited to give lectures, seminars or just information briefs. The invited speakers normally have a reputation for knowing Spanish society, such as a journalist or an academic, or someone who could present facts about fiscal issues or a topic that the organisers think would be of common interest. On two of the occasions when I visited the clubs, the talks were concerned with Spanish and transnational regulations regarding tax declarations. These occasions were well attended, though mostly by older or middle-aged individuals who seemed to be listening attentively to the presentation whilst sipping their glasses of wine or cups of coffee. At these tax declaration events, the invited speaker was representing an agency which offered such expertise and, after the talk, the audience had the opportunity to ask questions and to book a consultation with the representative.

A third example was when one club invited a representative from a Spanish healthcare chain to inform members about their residential care centres. The event was attended by about 15 people, all of whom appeared to be elderly. The event was introduced by the current chair of the club, who said 'In spite of all of us getting older and in need of care, not all of us want to return back to our homeland – at least I don't – and there should be an option to stay'. Then she handed the floor to the representative, saying that she might be able to offer members something positive. With the help of an interpreter (from Spanish to Swedish) the representative painted a rich picture of their centres, which were located 'in beautiful settings near the sea and the countryside'. These centres are designed to care for the elderly and people in a situation of dependency and provide 24-h nursing care and daily doctors' visits, the representative said, explaining that the staff would be Spanish (though there would be access to Swedish-speaking staff) and that the centres hosted tenants from a variety of countries, including Spaniards. All this met with no negative responses but the audience seemed less enthusiastic about the monthly fees, as these were seen to be equivalent to the average Swedish retirement pension!

These examples are intended to illustrate how the social clubs have geared their activities to include services, information and activities which are relevant mainly to life as migrants from Sweden living in Spain (cf. Gavanas 2017). As also observed by Casado-Diaz (2009) for British retirees in Spain, the clubs are, in a sense, offering their members (and prospective members) a guide to living a comfortable life in Spain, whilst also supporting them in their encounters with the unfamiliar rules, procedures and obligations of the Spanish fiscal system and facilitating their different transactions with Swedish society. In their efforts to provide information and services, the clubs are clearly targeting individuals of an older age (or at least with the corresponding needs) – via, for instance, putting on events about retirement homes or about appropriate strategies in terms of pensions and wills. The events in the examples above also make clear how the social clubs are collaborating with different entrepreneurs operating in Swedish space. As we will see, this engagement by clubs is a way of attracting not only as many members as possible but also members who have certain preferences and assets.

#### 4.3 The 'Swedish' social club

In my field data, there are many examples of how the social clubs under examination here expect that their members and potential members will be of Swedish origin. It is commonly assumed that their members would 'need social interaction', implicitly with their fellow Swedes. Most of the activities and events are organised in order to

fulfil these expectations; there are probably only very rare exceptions when the clubs tried to approach local Spanish society and open up social boundaries. Lena, who is one of the leading individuals behind a large network of Swedes on the Costa Blanca, told me of an initiative to organise an excursion jointly with a local Spanish association for senior citizens. This attempt failed completely as 'The Spaniards were sitting on one side of the bus, speaking intensively with each other, and the Swedes on the other'. Apart from this initiative, there have been a few individual attempts to socialise with the locals but, basically, no one is really interested, Lena told me.

I have, in the previous section, mentioned the expansionist policy on the agenda of the larger clubs, whereby they tried to attract as many new members as possible. However, there is clearly also a selection process for members, evident through the way in which activities are framed. The clubs frequently gear their activities towards those who are retired (or at least elderly) and who are looking not only for a social life with others in the networks but also the kind of service and support that enables them to have a comfortable life in Spain. The language used in most of the activities and events as well as the information circulated on websites and magazines will exclude those who are not fluent in one of the Scandinavian languages. When I questioned this nationality bias, the respondent, in most cases, explained that it related to their situation as immigrants from Sweden – a seemingly strong argument in support of the Swedes in the networks who are presumed to speak only very basic Spanish and fairly good English. As the Scandinavian countries have much in common, not least their linguistic affinities, Norwegians, Danes and definitely the Swedish-speaking Finns are able to participate. However, the emphasis on Swedish origins in the clubs' repertoires clearly signals to whom the invitation cards were sent. For instance, the articles and information about pensions and other legal issues clearly addressed Swedish readers and the setting-up of activities was, in many cases, based on the clubs' Swedish affiliation. Here the Swedish migrant becomes the norm and all others have to request a modification to their specific country rules.<sup>8</sup>

The Swedish origin is at the core of the clubs' organisation of events and services. Members are expected to have maintained their connections with Sweden or at least to still have some commitments there. Shortly after Lennart was assigned as the chair for his club, he expressed his vision about the transnational possibilities which he perceived as an interesting prospect – namely, entrepreneurs 'bringing their company down here'. According to Lennart, these entrepreneurs would face a number of language problems, tax difficulties and legal issues. He suggested that the clubs should create solutions to this and that he 'would like to establish a pool of auditors, lawyers and accountants with juridical competency and contacts with the authorities and all such stuff'. Many of the events organised by the clubs were concerned with similar issues, where transnational engagements and transactions were the focus. I particularly noted one club evening where the club hosted a 'seminar with tapas and wine', at which a financial business representative was invited to give a presentation on 'interesting investment opportunities'. The company presented itself as a management agency specialising in 'independent financial consulting for wealthy private individuals, businessmen and institutions but with a focus on Swedes and Nordics who regularly live in Spain and Sweden'. This event was advertised in Swedish on the website of this large club and, seemingly, without further notice, used the club house for their campaign. It is quite clear that the club and the company behind this event were sharing their interest in those who are wealthy and live in Sweden as well as Spain. This profile of a club's activity demonstrates that it is a matter

of promoting an interest that, in many ways, is interwoven with those of business-related companies and entrepreneurs. Together these accounts speak clearly of the national and transnational reality into which the clubs are positioning themselves. They show that, when the associations are reinventing themselves as service mediators, there are significant overlaps with the interests of business-owners in the area, as consumption could be exchanged for membership and *vice versa*. Both the clubs and the entrepreneurs are, in other words, benefiting from having access to a lively ethnic network of people who could be both stable consumers and members of a community.

## 5 Conclusion: lifestyle and the diasporic infrastructure

The large social associations in Southern Spain have engaged in the social networks and lives of their Swedish migrant members by, for instance, striving to become social clubs in the full sense of the word. As a Swedish social club, they offer a home-like environment with extensive possibilities for a social life in Swedish. At the same time, the clubs are assuming some kind of responsibility for the quality of life of a Swedish migrant in Spain. This partly implies that the clubs will organise different cultural and informational activities, circulate information and provide services which are assumed to be of interest to their members and which will, in other ways, promote a 'good life' for the Swedish migrants in Spain. The immediate rationale behind this expanded engagement is the pragmatic goal of increasing the number of members in the club and to become important players in the networks of Swedish migrants. However, this 'fishing' for members also sets the norm for the kind of members the club is representing. It is, for instance, apparent how the clubs make a particular effort to provide information and services that are of interest to those who have financial and other commitments in both Spain and Sweden. However, the clubs are less engaged in other issues which are potentially important in the life of Swedish migrants. Hence, day-care possibilities and leisure-time activities for families and young people are very rarely (if ever) a subject in the clubs' activity repertoires. In the same way, common social problems such as the danger of extensive alcohol consumption or leisure time for young people rarely becomes an issue on this agenda.

This demonstrates that the larger social clubs are framing their activities and information to not only include those who are of Swedish origin (despite the club's official Nordic affiliation) but also pay particular attention to segments of these networks who are at an advanced age and who benefit still from a sound financial situation. This framing of activities resonates with Oliver and O'Reilly's (2010) observation of a reproduction of class amongst British lifestyle migrants in Spain – an observation which arguably could be expanded to reproduction patterns on both age and ethnic dimensions. Even if Spain in this context becomes a place where status and class will not easily be read through the individual's occupation and also a place to where many migrate in order to re-invent themselves and discover something new, there seem to be social mechanisms which promote segregation on all three dimensions. In line with the argument I pursue in this article, the social clubs are some of the most prevalent actors in the making of the Swedish community in Southern Spain. However, a closer inspection of the practices they engage in shows that they are also agents creating a class- and age-segmented social space for Swedish migrants.

The clubs' engagement with Swedish social life is, in my understanding of the process, part of a broader 'infrastructure'

(Larkin 2013) of practices which are converging in the mobilisation of a Swedish lifestyle diaspora in Southern Spain. The social clubs accounted for here are not the only actors providing social and practical services to Swedish migrants in Southern Spain. There are also a number of networks and small-scale associations run by, for example, churches and schools, which, in different ways, are engaged in the promotion of the well-being of the Swedish population there. These organisations and associations have converging interests in building the space where Swedish migrants meet, socialise and, to some extent, also consume, in what was intended to be their 'home abroad' (Lundström 2014: 151), rather than participating or attempting to integrate in Spanish society. This interest is, to some extent, also shared by entrepreneurs who advertise their businesses in a market targeting Scandinavians in Spain (Börestam 2011). Seen from this perspective, these organisations outline a structure which will guide members towards a Swedish social space in Spain. The implicit message in these guidelines is that a social life devoted to a community of Swedish migrants is more 'normal' than being able, themselves, to take an interest and participate in Spanish society – a lifestyle which (together with, for instance, alcohol abuse and tax evasion) often figures in the media as portraying Swedish migrants in Spain (cf. Lundström 2014). By this I am not implying that Swedish migrants in Southern Spain are exclusively a bunch of elderly, wealthy and 'clear-cut' ethnic Swedes. The current study does not provide answers to the question of how the individuals in general find sociality and comfort in their situation; however, from other studies (e.g. Gavanoas 2017; Lundström 2014; Woube 2014), it is obvious that there is no uniform way of being a Swedish migrant in Spain. It is not uncommon, for instance, to find some kind of 'downward mobility' amongst Swedish migrants – not, at least, for women who exchange their economic prosperity in Sweden for the 'good life' in Spain (Lundström 2014).

The 'mobilising practices' (Sökefeld 2006) seen in the community-making of Swedish lifestyle migrants in Spain have many general similarities with the diasporisations of other groups of refugees and labour migrants (e.g. Braziel & Mannur 2003; Vertovec & Cohen 1999). The vehicles enabling these practices are, in many cases, associations, networks and cultural establishments which create social arenas in which migrants can engage on the assumption of having a shared 'homeland' interest and a social life in the migrants' native language. The case of the Swedish in Southern Spain further demonstrates that this instrumental support service – designed to provide migrants with a comfortable life and the easy consumption of services and goods – becomes one of the wheels on these vehicles, bringing a clear class dimension to the understanding of diasporic processes.

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## Notes

1. In the official statistics on the population in Spain (see [www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es)), about 23,000 Swedish citizens are registered as residents, of whom more than 60 per cent live in the southern part of mainland Spain. However, it is well-known that many do not register their stay in Spain and many live there on a 'seasonal' basis. An inquiry made by the lobbying organisation *Svenskar i världen* (Swedes Worldwide) estimates the actual population at around 90,000 (SVIV 2015).
2. This is, of course, a simplified portrait, though Swedish migrants are scattered all over Spain and do not live exclusively in 'tourist' destinations.
3. With the word 'moving', I here refer to all those who move to Spain as 'permanent' migrants as well as those who visit the area regularly as 'seasonal visitors' – which is the majority – or as 'long-term' tourists (so-called peripatetic migrants).
4. There are an obvious number of other 'Nordic' migrants to Sweden – most of them from Finland – who will pass as Swedes in the Swedish population in Spain. In addition, there are, in the same Spanish areas, a number of Swedish migrants of, for instance, Latin American or Middle-Eastern origin.
5. All cited interviewees are in pseudonym.
6. According to the statutes, membership of the association is restricted to individuals with Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian or Swedish citizenship. The majority of these are of Swedish nationality.
7. Obviously, the information is referring to the bureaucratic term NIE ( *número de identificación de extranjeros*), which is the foreigners' identification number used for census and tax registration. However, with a translation into Swedish as 'nio' (nine) – in Swedish parlance often pronounced in a similar way to the Spanish word – it takes on a humorous but quite different connotation.
8. Note that I am not implying that these examples are unique for Nordic clubs. Probably, the Nordic/Scandinavian clubs in these regions all have their own particular 'national' dominance. For instance, the Nordic associations in some parts of the Costa Blanca are heavily dominated by Norwegian migrants, and in a particular area of the Costa del Sol, some of the Nordic clubs are exclusively visited by Finnish-speaking migrants.

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