

Thinking through lifestyle migration in an era of austerity

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Starting points

To take the example of the UK, because there are no longer jobs in the traditional destination countries emigration of British citizens is likely to go down. And because unemployment rises, house prices tumble and the British Pound falls and income, savings and pensions dwindle and lose value, fewer people will be able to afford a (second) home in the sun and retire to Spain or Cyprus ... retirement migrants might return back home to enjoy the safety of European welfare states. (Düvell 2009: 2-3)

Lifestyle Migration (I)

... 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 and O'Reilly 2009: 621)

[These] are migrations where aesthetic qualities including quality of life are prioritized over economic factors like job advancement and income. (Knowles and Harper 2009: 11)

Lifestyle migration is a complex and nuanced phenomenon, varying from one migrant to another, from one location to the next. It holds at its core social transformation and wider processes; it is at once an individualized pursuit and structurally reliant; and it is a response to practical, moral and emotional imperatives (O'Reilly and Benson 2009: 11).

Lifestyle Migration (II)

Understanding Lifestyle Migration

- Emerging out of long-term ethnographic research
- *Relative* affluence
- Motivations prioritise lifestyle
- Limited account of economic factors within migration
- Cultural dimensions of migration (cultural constructions/ imaginings/aspiration of destinations, retirement, lifestyle etc.)

... the migration decision is reached through a combination of individualised biographies, trajectories and actions, as well as wider cultural contexts and structural conditions. (Benson 2012: 1681)

Lifestyle migration flows in a context of (economic) crisis (I)

Scenario : Economic transformation has an impact on lifestyle migration flows and mobility patterns

Research Questions:

- (1) What has been the impact of the economic crisis on lifestyle migration flows in Europe?
- (2) And how can we measure this?

Possible findings:

- Slowing of flows?
- Increase in return migration?
- Directions of flow (where to, where from)

Lifestyle migration flows in a context of (economic) crisis (II)

Conclusions:

- Recentring of economic factors within lifestyle migration

Our analysis confirms the economic nature of the latent substrate on which the life in Spain of individuals labelled as lifestyle migrants is based. If the economic dimension of lifestyle migration ... played a secondary role, the residential mobility patterns of these groups would have barely changed as a result of the onset of economic crisis. (Huete, Mantecón and Estévez 2013: 345)

Lifestyle migration flows in a context of (economic) crisis (III)

(Some) problems with interpretation:

- Transforms context into explanation
- Assumes that in times of crisis, economics becomes a priority for people
- Impacts of crisis presented as homogeneous
- Ignores the possible influence of other factors within migration
- Reduces economic crisis to economic interpretations – i.e. economic transformation does not have any consequences for social/cultural transformation
- Neglects local contexts and individual circumstances/experiences

Lifestyle migration research in a time of (economic) crisis (I)

Scenario: Lifestyle migration continues within a context of economic crisis

(Some) Research Questions:

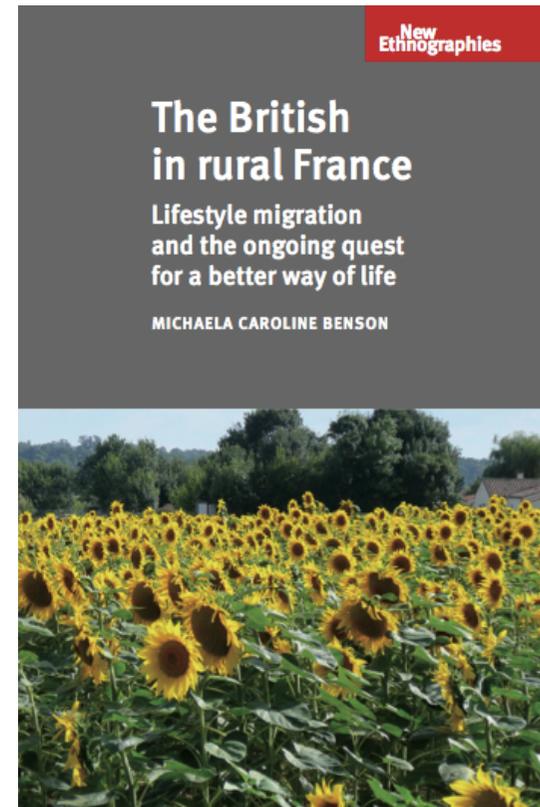
- (1) How can we explain the continuation of lifestyle migration practices within the context of the economic crisis?
- (2) What are the impacts in lifestyle flows under the context of the economic crisis?
- (3) What are the transformations in lifestyle flows within a context of economic crisis, and how can we understand these?
- (4) What are the impacts of the economic crisis on the daily lives of lifestyle migrants?

A brief interlude (I)

A precedent for understanding lifestyle migration in a time of (economic) crisis

Understanding British migration to rural France

- Imaginings of destination – rural idyll
- Individualized and personalized biographies
- Wider social, political and economic contexts
- Social, cultural and economic capital



A brief interlude (II)

Escaping Thatcher

When? Late 1980s-early 1990s (recession)

Who? Families of working age with (young) children, public sector workers

Motivations? Long-term desire to move abroad, social and economic change

Context? Redundancy/early retirement

Understanding migration

- *Relative* cost of property and exchange rate
- Individual and personalised biographies
- Imaginings of destination and post-migration lives
- Redundancy payouts
- Cultural capital
- Freedom of movement within Europe

Lifestyle migration research in a time of (economic) crisis (II)

Future Directions:

- More nuanced understandings of the relationship between economic crisis and lifestyle migration required
- This does not mean reinventing the wheel, but drawing on the traditions of lifestyle migration research, in particular:
 - (1) Methodological expertise – ethnographic and qualitative research to augment more quantitative accounts
 - (2) Conceptual ‘toolkit’ – adopting and adapting accepted understandings of lifestyle migration to current context

Conclusions

Understanding emigration in a time of crisis

- **Beware the trap of the economic as explanation!**
- **Nuanced understandings and interpretations of emigration and post-emigration lives**
- **Do not reinvent the wheel**

References used

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