

Problematizing the ‘Good Life’ on the Costa del Sol: Detecting Diversity in Privileged Experiences of Northern European Migrant Retirees

Problematizando la “buena vida” en la Costa del Sol: Detectando diversidad entre experiencias privilegiadas de migrantes jubilados Norte Europeos

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Abstract

This article focuses on the concept of the ‘good life’, a term that arises between northern European retirees engaging in lifestyle migration on the Costa del Sol, Malaga (Spain). The search for the ‘good life’ is an expression frequently used between retiree lifestyle migrants to describe their motivations for taking the migration plunge in search for a better quality of life in a new destination. This article uses ethnographic vignettes and interview snippets where the term appears in order to explore the growing diversity within the trend, exposing its connections to four recurrent factors that shape migrants new lifestyles in la Costa del Sol: weather, health, leisure, and work. By unpacking the relationship between these ‘good life’ building blocks and the migrant’s lifestyles, the article aims to gain a deeper comprehension of different privileged migrant experiences and its connections with intersecting identity axes.

Keywords: lifestyle; migration; retirement; identity

Resumen

Este artículo se centra en el concepto de ‘good life’ (o “buena vida”), un término que surge entre los migrantes jubilados norte europeos en la Costa del Sol, Málaga (España). La búsqueda de la ‘buena vida’ es una expresión que se usa con frecuencia entre los migrantes jubilados para describir su razonamiento para dar el paso y migrar a un país extranjero en busca de una mejor calidad de vida. Este artículo utiliza viñetas etnográficas y fragmentos de entrevistas donde aparece el término para explorar la creciente diversidad dentro de la tendencia, exponiendo sus conexiones a cuatro factores recurrentes que dan forma a los nuevos estilos de vida de los migrantes en la Costa del Sol: clima, salud, ocio y trabajo. Al desempaquetar la relación entre estos bloques que configuran la ‘buena vida’ y los estilos de vida de los migrantes, el artículo pretende obtener una comprensión más profunda de las diferentes experiencias de los migrantes privilegiados y sus conexiones con los ejes identitarios con los cuales se cruza.

Palabras clave: estilos de vida; migración; jubilación; identidad

Introduction

La Costa del Sol, Malaga, is a common retirement destination for many Northern Europeans due to its high quality of life at a low cost of living. The kilometric Spanish coast provides what many Northern European migrant retirees call the ‘good life’. In commercials for legal agencies offering services to Northern Europeans, the term appears: ‘too busy living the good life in Spain to take care of paperwork? Don’t worry! We’ve got you covered’. Printed in charity pamphlets that describe new volunteers the term appears again: ‘Now retired to Spain and enjoying the good life, because I am not ready to vegetate yet!’ (Field notes February 2019). Or simply in casual conversation, as a joke, when someone slips some alcohol from a flask into his or her morning coffee and the other remarks ‘living the good life, eh?’ (Field notes March 2019).

The term might seem like any other expression meant to describe holiday living, or just a general aspiration that many migrants have; but when ripped apart it can reveal the intricacies of different lifestyles that aim towards self-realization over utilitarian considerations (Korpela 2014). Between leisure, volunteering, and work, the ‘good life’ is embodied in many ways. Depending on past work experiences and personal history, the way the ‘good life’ is conceived of and executed differs (Mazón Martínez, Huete y Mantecón 2011). Consequently, the myriad of meanings given to the ‘good life’ reflects aspects of a subjects’ identity, such as gender, nationality, or socioeconomic class. How these intersect with one another generates the unique privileged migration experience of these Northern European migrant retirees living on the sunny Costa del Sol.

While conducting fieldwork in two municipalities on the Costa del Sol, I found that questioning this taken for granted term while in the field, what it means for each Northern European migrant retiree that uses it, and what actions it follows, generated valuable insight about retirement migration as a phenomenon and individual identity reconstruction processes. Consequently, this article shows how questioning taken for granted terms while in the field can provide insight on the phenomena in question. The problematization of this term rising from the field can act as an aid during fieldwork as well as furthering analysis once fieldwork has been concluded.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to provide a snapshot of the diversity of the privileged Northern European migrant retiree experience through the lens of the ‘good life’, a term that flourishes from the field itself. First the article will delve into how the concept of the ‘good life’ comes about thanks to the phenomenon of lifestyle and retirement migration. Then it will examine the term within the context of the Costa del Sol, what meanings it is given and what activities are considered as part of the ‘good life’, all unpacked through ethnographic vignettes and interview snippets collected through fieldwork conducted from February to May 2019 for my ongoing doctoral thesis.

Giving birth to the 'good life': lifestyle and retirement migration

A variety of disciplines study the north-south mobility of relatively privileged migrant retirees in Spain from different perspectives. Each of these perspectives uses a different term to describe this type of migration, highlighting which aspect of the phenomenon it focuses on. For example, there are those who speak of residential migration or residential tourism, mostly from a Spanish-speaking scholarship (Casado 1998, 1999; Hall y Müeller 2004; Mazón Martínez Huete y Mantecón 2009; Huete y Mantecón 2010; Mazón Martínez, Huete y Mantecón 2011; Huete, Mantecón y Estevez 2012). These authors tend to focus on the host country and the effects this type of migration has on it in regards to property, land, overall environment and their effect on the general tourist appeal of the space (Huete 2005; Rodríguez Rodríguez 2004; Membrado 2013, 2015). Then there are those studies that speak about geriatric migration (or gerontoinmigración). These authors come from Sociology or Law and focus on how these migrants experience old age in relation to their rights (Echezarreta 2005; Durán y Martín 2008; Echezarretta 2016, 2018; Durán 2018), how they are received by the host country welfare system (Fuentes 2015; Álvarez et al 2018) and their effects on tourism (Durán 2012).

The final approach, which is the one applied in the article, comes from an Anglo Saxon background which focuses on the individual migrant and their motivations, emphasizing the escape narratives they construct, as well as understanding migration not as a single trip but as an ongoing process that encompasses everything before and after the move. In other words, this term associates mobility with the creation of lifestyles in a direct manner (Benson & O'Reilly 2009; King 2002; Oliver 2008; Oliver y O'Reilly 2010). This approach uses the term lifestyle migration, which is defined as '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' (O'Reilly & Benson 2009: 2). Within the umbrella of lifestyle migration is retirement migration, which entails mobility in search for a better life after work. In many instances retirement migration is tinted by the search for wellness and health through the migration experience. Ultimately, retiree lifestyle migrants are consumers of a new destination and the lifestyle changes it offers (Oliver & O'Reilly 2010). As a doctoral thesis that revolves around identity (re)construction processes due to migration and ageing, way of life and the individual motivations that drive migrants to certain decisions are key for the theoretical framework. Consequently, this article, and the doctoral research it stems from, uses the term lifestyle and retirement migration when speaking of this migration phenomenon in la Costa del Sol.

The decisions taken by the Northern European migrant retirees participating in this research are a product of a chain of lifestyle decisions that offer them a 'better' retirement and ageing experience. The chain of lifestyle decisions that can lead to a 'better' retirement or ageing experience is often verbalized through the 'good life'. This is not the first time this has been noted in academia. The search for the 'good life' is a consistent theme within comparative lifestyle migration studies where those in privileged social positions migrate to places like the Costa del Sol, Algarve in Portugal, or Pucón in Chile, just to name a few (Benson & O'Reilly 2009; Torkington, David, and Sardinha 2015). As a means to romanticize the migration process, the term also reveals an escape narrative based on the re-negotiation of the migrant's balance between work life and personal life (Benson & O'Reilly 2009). This migration narrative based on self-realization exposes how these lifestyle migrants do not want to be seen as simple consumers of good weather and low prices but as on a journey of self-discovery. The

‘search for the good life’ is integral to the imaginary of individual self-realization constructed by lifestyle and retirement migrants. The ‘good life’ is a concept that is present in the migrants daily narratives, informing their realities and helping (re)construct their identities. The term recognizes a connection with tourism and the notion of being on a ‘permanent holiday’ (Torkington, David, and Sardinha 2015), while also representing the fluid and reflexive modernity of today’s society (Bauman 2007; Beck 1994). The only ones who can escape the strains of the risk society are those with enough socioeconomic privilege to plan a lifestyle that focuses on the consumption of leisure, wellbeing, and work on their own terms.

Therefore, the ‘good life’ is born from a migration trend observed from many academic angles due to its ubiquity in the daily lives of those who engage in these migration practices. Due to this persistent permanence in the field and its connection to lifestyle migration practices as a whole, studying the term in the specificity of the Costa del Sol aims to understand both the shared logic of these migrant retirees with others

Questioning the ‘good life’ in place: La Costa del Sol

Northern European retirees started to flock to the Costa del Sol in the 80’s, after Spain joined the European Union (EU). Due to the growing tourism industry of package holidays, many Northern Europeans got to know the Costa del Sol and started to acquire holiday homes there. This first contact with the area as a tourist was the first step towards planning retirements in Spain for many Northern Europeans (Oliver & O’Reilly 2010; Rodriguez Rodriguez 2004). Coupling the good weather and the low-cost of living in Spain with the higher wages and pensions earned in Northern European countries, migrating from the North to the South of Europe as a means of bettering one’s retirement became a trend that lives on to this day¹. Undoubtedly, globalization plays a key role in the rise of this migration trend, especially as movement and communication becomes increasingly cheaper. This north-south mobility is no longer a form of tourism it is a migration practice that reflects a global circulation of capital as well as relationships of power and class (Croucher 2009; Lázaro 2014; Kunz 2016; Hayes and Perez-Gañán 2016). The rising longevity of Northern Europeans, as well as their access to expendable wealth (Benson & O’Reilly 2009), simply facilitated the expansion and maintenance of this lifestyle migration trend over time as well as made it accessible to those with different socioeconomic backgrounds. Hence, all the studies in different disciplines regarding this trend and all of its components, like law, gerontology, medicine, and sociology.

This longstanding migration trend is evident in the variety of Northern European communities found on the Malagueña coast. In the neighboring municipalities of Fuengirola and Mijas, which is between Marbella and Malaga City, there are between 24,000-25,000 foreigners. Of these, the majority comes from the United Kingdom, closely followed by Germany, according to the Padrón de Habitantes (Town Hall Registry). The lack of Scandinavians on the Town Hall Registry is commonly attributed to the seasonal variation of lifestyle retirement migration, coming to the Costa del Sol in the winter months and returning to their home countries in the summer. Therefore, there is no clear record of the Scandinavian presence on the Costa del Sol. Many northern European lifestyle retiree migrants do not register with the Town Hall for a variety of reasons (tax evasion, country loyalty,

¹ In 2018, Malaga had 75,372 British residents, of which the majority were above the age of 60 (Instituto de Estadística y Cartografía de Andalucía), exemplifying the span of this phenomenon.

constant movement), making it hard to gauge the actual impact of the trend (Durán 2012). This variety of migration practices, socioeconomic backgrounds, and different nationalities as well as longstanding history is why this area of the Costa del Sol is significant.

Fuengirola and Mijas: Methodological considerations in the field

The ethnographic data used in this article is part of an ongoing doctoral investigation. During four months of fieldwork in the beginning of 2019, I collected a variety of ethnographic data in two municipalities of Málaga, Fuengirola and Mijas. These neighboring municipalities offer different socioeconomic demographics, allowing a heterogeneous look at different levels of privilege within the same migration trend and ethnographic space. I collaborated with two communities, a British community and a Scandinavian one, being part of social events and charities where I conducted participant observation. In addition to this, 30 in-depth semi-directed interviews were completed with retired North European expatriates and 7 with those providing services to the group in question such as legal advisers, government officials, and business owners. There were also two focus groups, one in each community. Both focus groups were carried out towards the end of fieldwork in order to question those recurring patterns that appeared during participant observation and interviews.

The age of the participants ranged from 65 to 80, with few exceptions. Most Britons migrated with the intention of permanently residing on the Costa del Sol, while Scandinavians leaned towards seasonal migration. The gran majority had spent the summers on the Costa del Sol prior migration, or had lived abroad and now sought retirement in an equally warm climate, but closer to their home country. With its warm climate, good infrastructure and reduced cost of living, the Costa del Sol allows them to 'squeeze' their pensions and other income. However, British retired migrants were experiencing a change in their privileged position due to Brexit, which harmed them economically and jeopardized their freedom of movement. This political occurrence mostly hurt those of middle and working classes. Many resorted to their savings and others worked informally in order to afford living in Spain. Some even had to return to the United Kingdom, be it due to economic strains or because of the anxiety induced by the political uncertainty. However, the most common reason to return to the country of origin in both communities was the death of a couple, health problems, or if grandchildren were born. Consequently, maintaining roots with the home country is common across Northern European communities.

Among the retired Northern European migrants, there are large socioeconomic differences, reflected in the pool of research participants. There were those of the upper-middle class, who were part of social clubs (golf or nautical) and had multiple properties in Spain and in their native countries. Then there are those of middle and working class who volunteered, attended activities organized by the city council, or went from bar to bar as a social activity and rented apartments to live in, often having to sell their properties back in their home countries to finance migration and retirement. The legal situation of each migrant is an indicator of socioeconomic differences. Those with more resources hired a legal manager to advise them on their legal status. In some cases, this meant obtaining residency in Spain but in others it implied abstaining from all kinds of bureaucratic processes in order to continue enjoying services offered by their native countries. Those who could not afford a manager did

not have access to such privileged information and, then, depended on the experiences of their acquaintances or the knowledge of charities.

During fieldwork in Fuengirola and Mijas, the term ‘good life’ rose naturally from the field. Due to the extensive academic literature on the term as well as its presence across lifestyle migration practices, I was already informed of going into the field and was alerted of its importance. However, I did not interject the term into contexts where it wasn’t already present. The term appeared in a myriad of contexts: in commercials, jokes, as a way to judge others’ lifestyle choices, or as a means of reiterating identities through the rejection of others. There seemed to be a common understanding of what the term meant between its users. The manner in which it appeared in different contexts revealed the complexity of this migration process, indicating socioeconomic, political, historical, and gender differences between its users.

As Oliver and O’Reilly (2010) suggest, the search for ‘good life’ in the Costa del Sol intends to be a class-less endeavor of self-reinvention when in reality differences in privilege, and therefore class, are noted through new language and social codes. The way the ‘good life’ is conceptualized and executed manifests this. In other words, the class-less community migrants’ aim to attain through lifestyle and retirement migration is translated into new terms. These new terms can be glimpsed through the ‘good life’ if activated as an analytical catalyst on the field.

The following pages problematize the take for granted-ness of the ‘good life’ as a means to depict the heterogeneity of the lifestyle and retirement migration phenomenon in la Costa del Sol. Thus capturing the intricacies of these migrants’ realities through a term that isn’t imposed onto them but is born from these migration practices.

The ‘good life’ in action

While conducting fieldwork in Fuengirola and Mijas, I placed special attention to the use of the term the ‘good life’. This entailed a detailed observation of the contexts in which the term appeared and, in order to understand the logic behind its usage, I devised follow up questions to those that used it in an informal manner or in in-depth interviews. This created a moment of reflection in cooperation with the research participants about their chosen lifestyle and the way they understand it within their communities, generating ethnographic data on the variety of life histories and discourses between Northern European migrant retirees. Therefore, this entire section points out the importance of questioning terms that rise from the field during fieldwork, and during analysis, in order to gain a deeper perspective on the studied experience.

The term appeared in contexts regarding weather, health, leisure, and work. When asking what the ‘good life’ was, good weather is the one constant that appeared across nationalities and socioeconomic backgrounds. The sunny weather provides an environment in which a wide range of activities can take place. What vary are the activities encompassed under these categories. The activities that each individual or community consider as the ‘good life’ reveal a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and sociopolitical contexts as well as hint at the connections with wider western discourses of ageing, gender, migration, and retirement.

The following ethnographic vignettes are separated in four categories: weather, health, leisure, and work, reflecting the recurrent contexts in which the ‘good life’ appears. These vignettes will portray how the term is used, by whom, and why, exemplifying the heterogeneity of this migration phenomenon. Questioning the

'good life', its meanings, and the activities it implies helps further understand the Northern European migrant retiree experience in the Costa del Sol.

Earning its name: 'you know it's called la Costa del Sol for a reason!'

The weather is a character of its own that is ever present in the lives of northern European retiree migrants. All agree that the sunny weather is one of the primary reasons for migrating; it is the greatest pull factor the area has to offer followed by its cheap cost of living. In the discourses about their migration experiences, the weather appears at its forefront when constructing a comparative narrative between home country and destination. Having a sunny sky over one's head is a mood changer that can have repercussions on one's health and social life. One Danish woman suffered from such acute winter depressions that coming to la Costa del Sol seemed like the perfect move to improve her mental health (Field notes February 2019). These types of stories are common between Northern Europeans, especially Scandinavians, who speak about winter depressions and their limited social lives due to great amounts of snow and low temperatures that make it both physically and mentally harder to engage in any type of activity, especially when older and frailer. Consequently, the weather is at the forefront of a migrant's comparative narrative between the Costa del Sol and their home country, giving a clear advantage to Spain.

The weather isn't only mentioned in a one-dimensional note; it can also indicate aspects such as socioeconomic status. For some the weather can be reminiscent of their past work lives in other foreign countries. These tend to be high-end corporate jobs or government associated positions that brought them to places like Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, or a number of African countries like Zimbabwe. After growing accustomed to warmer climates, these northern European retiree migrants with a high socioeconomic status report not wanting to return to their cold home countries for retirement, while also refusing to stay in the foreign country they were working in. As Mathias, a 75-year-old Norwegian ex-air force pilot who lived in Tanzania for 10 years explained:

After living in an African country you don't want to go back to shoveling snow in the streets of Norway. Did you know that it snows so much that it can pile up so high that it is dangerous when cutting corners? It is crazy. Why would I want to live like that? I don't want to be worrying about falling over ice and snow now that I am old (Field notes February 2019).

Mathias is one of many who come from other warm climate foreign countries due to their jobs and in retirement prefer Spain. This tidbit of conversation is an example of how such a typical topic of 'small talk' like the weather can actually shed light on pivotal aspects of a person's migration experience when in the field. In the case of Mathias, speaking about the weather was what led the conversation to his job in the air force and his time in Africa being part of a community of foreigner's, similar to the one created in la Costa del Sol. It also revealed his worries about getting older and being more vulnerable to falls and broken bones.

Ultimately the weather is seen as a way of opening a door to an infinity of possible ways to spend one's time during retirement. It gives an illusion of freedom: freedom to travel from one place of Spain to another, to do exercise outside, to socialize in the sun...etc. Even if in reality they actually do not take advantage of all

physical state. He followed it by saying he was living the good life (Field notes February 2019).

In this instance the decision to leave their car behind was motivated by the pursuit of maintaining good health in later life, decision facilitated by the warm weather.

However, something very interesting occurred right after Bob told me about his plans to keep in shape during retirement. He got up to go outside with another coffee morning attendee when I heard someone mutter under their breath 'trying to be healthy but can't quit smoking huh?' referring to Bob, who apparently had gone outside for a smoke (Field notes February 2019). The influence of the successful ageing paradigm is visible as those around Bob were judging his actions as 'wrong' or 'right' ways of living the 'good life'. The small off hand comment revealed that the 'good life' isn't only pursued it is also judged, as the successful ageing paradigm pushes towards 'success' or 'failure'.

The way in which it is judged can be strongly gendered. Between women the connection of health and 'good life' is very clear and riddled with judgment. Many of the women participating in this research had smart watches that count their steps as a way to monitor their activity but also becomes into a subject of conversation and debate. Maggie, a 67-year-old woman from the British expatriates club, is a great example of how the pursuit of the healthy 'good life' can be gendered as well as informed by one's socioeconomic background. Her husband is extremely wealthy, having worked in the oil business in the Middle East, and they both don't mind showing off their wealth. This is clear when Maggie claims shopping is her favorite way to exercise. She likes going to different town centers, or 'pueblos', to explore new shops and 'get some steps in' (Field notes April 2018). Other women with a middle class socioeconomic background could never sustain a lifestyle like that, exchanging the shopping for long walks down the beach or in the countryside. The way Maggie openly broadcasts what she has bought in the span of an afternoon while also recounting how many kilometers she has walked while doing so is an event that doesn't happen with men and generates judgment from other members who disagree with this form of 'exercise'.

For men the pursuit of the 'good life' in regards to health takes on a more dire turn. Many of the Northern European social events in Fuengirola and Mijas are full of widowed women, exemplifying the reality of men's younger age of death. In a coffee morning in Mijas there are only two men who are regulars, Adam and John. These two men, who are in their 80's, get together every morning to do weight training and other exercises. Adam claims that his male friends' 'fatal flaw' is staying at home doing crossword puzzles or simply going out to the bar for a pint (Field notes March 2019). Adam and John do these exercises in the municipal parks, where there are several public fitness machines. Besides the training they also play petanque twice a week for a small fee in a public court. As their resources are limited they use public facilities and do not have access to any physiotherapists or trainers that other individuals from a higher socioeconomic class, do have access to.

The relationship between the 'good life' and health is ambivalent and complex. During many of these conversations about health I found people indulging in wine, pastries, or even pouring liqueurs into their morning coffee. The way people talk about their health related to living the 'good life' reveals how there is a great gap between what is said and what is actually done. This is because there is also a notion that retiring in la Costa del Sol is like living in a permanent holiday environment.

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Therefore, despite the influence of the successful ageing paradigm there is also some pressure to take advantage of the vacation state of mind. This ambivalence, and its repercussions on migrants' routines, lifestyles, and identities is what the next section explores.

Too much leisure time: “Yo no soy un turista”

Many Northern European retiree migrants started their migration experience as tourists, giving them the appetite for a way of life they also wanted in retirement (Oliver & O'Reilly 2010). Therefore, the difference between holiday living and retirement, being a tourist or a resident, are blurred (Rodriguez Rodriguez 2004). Daily activities of the research participants included walks on the beach, playing petanque, and meeting friends for coffee or drinks, all activities that are considered to be part of living 'the good life'. These activities could easily be included in the daily schedule of a tourist, exemplifying the haze between tourism and retirement on la Costa del Sol.

La Costa del Sol is a destination that is socially constructed as a 'holiday' space and as such it implies a break in routine, normally from work, in which people engage with leisure on a daily basis. For tourists this might mean constant sunbathing and drinking wine, but for the lifestyle and retirement migrants who live on the coast all year this type of behavior isn't sustainable. For example, Ida is a 70-year-old woman who has been living in Spain for 15 years and has a weekly routine involving taking care of her multiple cats and dogs, tending to her large garden, and fixing anything that needs to be fixed in her villa. However in her first years in la Costa del Sol she recalls having friends over all the time and resented following a schedule. Her notion of what the 'good life' is has changed over time.

You can always tell who the newbies are, they are always sitting at a bar having drinks all day. Once you have been here more than three months you start to realize you can't do that all the time, you need to do other things. This is the 'good life' [Ida gestures to her garden and sea views from her villa]. It is living a calm life doing what I love and having time to myself. I can't entertain and go around all day like I used to in the beginning, that is just stressful, and I just don't find that tourist stuff fun anymore. Now I like to tend to my garden and spend time reading or with the animals. (Interview April 14th, 2019).

In this excerpt Ida says the 'good life' for her is led by tranquility, while placing activities that tourists might do as the opposite. Therefore she is directly opposing the figure of a tourist, whose approach to leisure involves things like social drinking without a clear daily plan. Therefore leisure is measured in these communities: uncontrolled leisure is for tourists while controlled leisure is for residents. Devising one's own routine, even though it involves activities that are essentially leisure, is an aspect that distinguishes those who reside in Spain permanently, those who come for the winter months, and those who are tourists.

A common practice between retiree migrants that live permanently on the Costa del Sol is making a moral and class distinction between the status of resident and tourist based on the activities their itinerant Northern European counterparts partake in by measuring the quality and quantity of their leisure. This is especially prevalent within British higher socioeconomic contexts where there is an urge to avoid the label of tourist by establishing knowledge of Spanish culture and customs. The migrant retiree does so by publicizing Spanish knowledge and shaming those who partake in "too many" activities related to their home countries (Field notes March 2019). This is because British tourists have

negative reputations that imply irresponsible behavior such as extreme drunkenness accompanied by a disinterest in local customs that translates into only attending British establishments (Oliver & O'Reilly 2010: 61; Field notes May 2019).

For example, Nicholas and Maria are a wealthy British couple that have lived in Spain the last twenty years. They live a relaxed lifestyle consisting of walks around the town, eating out four to five times a week, and going to events at the club whenever they can. However, when discussing the lifestyle of their friends who migrate seasonally and constantly travel along the coast entertaining guests, they frown and say: "they act more like tourists. It's too hectic, that's not what living the 'good life' is about" (Interview March 14th 2019). This comment was quickly followed by a quip about attending traditional British Sunday Roast every week. This was a custom many of their seasonal friends had that they didn't partake in: "We only go to [Sunday Roast] when invited. We rather go to a Spanish restaurant. Going to Sunday Roast is just too common for us, its for people who do not want to integrate into Spanish culture". (Interview March, 14th 2019). Maria's comment shows how the way others execute their idea of 'good life' is judged by negatively equating it with the term 'tourist' while also publicizing their engagement with the Spanish environment. Through these remarks that classify a Sunday Roast as lower class or 'common', the couple is reaffirming their high socioeconomic status and their identity as permanent residents within the resident versus tourist scale. Therefore, class doesn't disappear in lifestyle migration; there is simply a language shift (Oliver & O'Reilly 2010).

These judgments, comparisons, and valuations around the 'good life' show hidden hierarchies of power between Northern European migrant retirees. Even though lifestyle and retirement migration have a non-materialistic rhetoric that seems to be driven by personal desires (Oliver & O'Reilly 2010: 51), the way the 'good life' leisure activities are measured suggest that migrant retirees still place themselves within a hierarchy of power and class.

Retirement and work: 'Breaking the wheel'

Lifestyle and retirement migration are marked by leisure and the absence of formal work. Therefore, the migrant is experiencing moments of identity (re)construction due to the inherent changes migration and retirement entail, reconfiguring one's time outside of their home country and the labor force. However, work still is a central ingredient to how the 'good life' is understood by retiree migrants as the phenomenon of retirement migration is partly driven by a need to recalibrate one's work/personal life scales in which having control over one's lifestyle is key.

The way a retiree lifestyle migrant imagines the 'good life' is directly informed by their previous work lives. If they did not have time for leisure activities or family members and friends, their execution of the 'good life' reflects that. For example, Cassandra a woman in her late 60's was a hairdresser and owner of her own beauty salon in the UK. However, she felt like she was working long hours and never had time for herself. She describes coming to Spain as a way to 'break the wheel' and dedicating time to what she loves, which involves a variety of sports, socializing, and spending time with her mother (Interview March 31st 2019). She shortly describes her life on the Costa del Sol as "more play and less work" (Interview March 31st 2019). In Cassandra's case, living the 'good life' is being able to indulge in a variety of leisure activities that she wasn't able to do before when she had her own business.

This rebalancing of the work/personal life scales isn't always followed by routinized leisure, like Cassandra. Often retirees resort to self-employment in order to maintain the lifestyle they desire. This ensures control over working conditions and acts as a means to an end, the end being the desired life-style (Benson & O'Reilly 2009: 3). Jane, a 78-year-old English woman living in Spain for the last 16 years, exemplifies this different connection between the 'good life' and work. Coming from a lower-middle class background migrating to Spain was a way to escape her grief after her husband died. However, she was a housewife and her widow's pension wasn't enough to support her retirement in a foreign country. In order to support herself she works informally as a manicurist. She doesn't particularly enjoy it but she views it as a means to an end, the end being a lifestyle she has autonomous control over (Interview April 6th 2019).

Having control over one's schedule is something both Cassandra and Jane enjoy, but due to their different socioeconomic backgrounds their relationship to work is different, which is reflected in the way they pursue the 'good life'. For Cassandra, activities widely considered as leisure, like attending Pilates classes and playing in different petanque leagues, is her daily routine. She has the socioeconomic privilege that allows her to routinize leisure activities, as she has a good pension scheme as well as multiple properties back in the UK that give her a source of income to rely on, while Judy does not. As a widow with little work experience and no notion of the Spanish language, Judy finds that she must work to support herself in her pursuit of the 'good life', which for her consists on much smaller activities like having some tea and cake with friends on the sea front and going for walks in the countryside.

In both of these cases work was somewhat of a negative factor that informed the execution of the 'good life', but in many instances work is an active positive factor. For retiree lifestyle migrants whose jobs have been integral to their identities, work tends to take an active role in their pursuit of the 'good life'. For Nicholas, a sales man who used to live in Asia and constantly travelled the world on business trips, still being able to work part time in his corporate job is crucial to the way he conceives of the 'good life'. In fact he refuses to think of himself as 'retired' and says that he is simply 'slowing down the pace' of his life (Field notes February 2019). Nicholas execution of the 'good life' wouldn't be possible without the increasing globalization and easy mobility that new technologies allow. He can stay in touch with the company he works for in Asia through email and Skype while also having access to his growing family thanks to the rise of cheap airline tickets between the UK and Spain. Therefore, the 'good life' for him is reducing his business trips and enjoying a space that is close enough to the UK so his family can visit more frequently.

These three migrants exemplify how pivotal work is when configuring the 'good life' while also showing the disparity of roles work can play within that constitution and its relationship to retired life. By analyzing the relationship these migrant's have with work, and where they place it within their imaginaries of the 'good life', it becomes evident how lifestyle and retirement migrants are a product of fluid and reflexive modernity, of the risk society (Giddens 1991). They represent those with enough economic privilege to attempt to escape the strains risk society supposes by planning a lifestyle that focuses on the consumption of leisure, wellbeing, and an autonomously controlled relationship to work.

Conclusions

Problematizing this taken for granted term is an analytical exercise that has proven useful in the field and outside. As a concept that is commonly used by retiree migrants themselves, it is entrenched between many key aspects of their lifestyles and identities such as the four explored above (weather, health, leisure, and work). By questioning the term in the field, the migrant entered into a reflexive space where they could think of him/herself, their migration experience, and place themselves within a web of meanings where aspects like gender, nationality, and socioeconomic background intersect. This reflexive space also exposed hierarchies of power within the communities studied, revealing how certain groups value or rank certain activities against their own (Spanish leisure time versus home country inspired leisure time) and devise ways of reasserting one's identities through this placement (as a tourist or a resident). Once outside of the field, during the phase of analysis, questioning the 'good life' led to a deeper understanding of the complexity behind a migration trend generally identified by its privilege. The 'good life' acts as an analytical catalyst outside of the field, helping draw connections between fluid modernity and individuality to the lifestyles and ageing choices these retiree migrants make.

There is still much more to explore about the migration and ageing experiences of Northern European lifestyle migrants. However, this article provides a brief snapshot of this trends heterogeneity and growing complexity, pointing out how Northern European migrant retiree experiences differ in relation to their socioeconomic class, gender, and nationalities; all key pillars of one's identity. This is all brought to the forefront through the term the 'good life', prevalent in the ethnographic context of the Costa del Sol. The term becomes an ethnographic and analytical catalyst that earmarks key aspects of the logic behind migrating to another country in order to pursue a 'better' ageing experience.

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