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BEING MISLEADING ABOUT WHERE ONE RESIDES

European Affluence Mobility and Registration Patterns

Klaus Schriewer and Irene Encinas Berg

Georg Simmel defined the sociological form of the “stranger” in 1908 not

as the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person who comes today and stays tomorrow. He is, so to speak, the *potential* wanderer: although he has not moved on, he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going (Simmel 1950: 402).

Simmel’s definitional contrast has been paradigmatic for the cultural and social sciences throughout the twentieth century. The wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow is the object of tourism research; the stranger who comes today and stays tomorrow is the focus of migration studies. In this second case, Simmel may well have been thinking of those who stay permanently, though the various forms mobility actually took seemed to fall into either one or the other of these categories.

Not until the early 1990s was this contrast seriously called into question. Few studies before then were dedicated to “multi-local” forms of life, and little attention had been paid to multilocality until the debate about globalization began. Yet, there seemed to be a new, third type located between Simmel’s dichotomy: a stranger who comes today but neither goes tomorrow nor stays tomorrow. This was a person who lived and acted in two or more places, or a wanderer moving between places, remaining in each for short periods.

This article focuses on this new, third type of stranger. It analyses the pattern of high mobility among people from northern European countries, most of whom are elderly and who have a residence both in northern and in southern Europe.¹

One of the more difficult issues is how these new strangers act with respect to their rights and duties in the respective places where they stay. It is an open question, both legally and administratively, to determine where those who move frequently ought to register their residence with the authorities, what their status is in terms of health care systems or welfare state benefits, and where they should pay taxes.

A case in point is the official registration by northern Europeans with the Spanish authorities, dealt with in more detail below. This article first introduces the research focus and conceptual framework, then turns to the legal framework, and then describes how Northern Europeans act and think about official registration in Spain.

Tourism, Migration and the Third Type of Stranger

The first studies of northern Europeans who came to Spain to buy property and spend longer time periods there were carried out during the 1970s. At first, scholars regarded these new strangers within the wider context of tourism. Property-oriented wanderers came from the same countries, colonized the same regions in Spain, and used the same transpor-

tation means as those who were coming as a part of the boom in mass tourism.

Hence, an early examination of migration to Spain referred to it on the one hand as “charter tourism” (of the package tour variety) while also noting the “neo-colonization of space” the new strangers represented (Gaviria et al. 1974). These were “odd/strange tourists” who abscond from an industrial sun “who could be compared with birds of passage who leave their chilly countries in the winter” (Gaviria 1976: 148).² At the same time, he describes aspects seemingly typical of migrants:

The house is a symbol of a permanent settlement in the country, [there is] an extreme care on house decoration, on orderliness and cleanliness, and on cultivating the garden; the house carries an emotional weight which can neither vary from one year to the next nor change the framework (Gaviria 1976: 153).³

Still, the phenomenon was conceptually bewildering. Some, following Gaviria, referred to winter or residential tourism (Galacho 1991). Others focused on it as a type of migration, calling it “elderly” (Fournier, Rasmussen & Serow 1988), “retirement” (Warnes 1994; King, Warnes & Williams 1998) or “gerontological” (Echezarreta 2005) migration.

By the 1990s, researchers in sociology and anthropology began to remark on a new quality in migration patterns. The sociologists Basch, Schiller, and Blanc (1993), for example, discovered close, continuous relationships between home and destination country among Mexican migrants in New York, particularly with respect to local and family networks. They dubbed this supposedly new type of mobility “transnationalism”, and this new type of migrants “transmigrants”. Terms like “multi-local lifestyles” or “poly-locality” (Beck 1997) have been used in similar characterizations.

Those who study movement into Spain have worked in the same direction. Karen O’Reilly’s studies of British citizens in Spain (2000, 2003), for example, have examined how these citizens think about Spain and Great Britain, and have asked about

their general self-awareness. She proposes a typology differentiating between “full” residents who live in Spain the whole year, “returning” residents who go back to their home country during the summer, “seasonal visitors” who only stay in Spain during the winter, and “peripatetic visitors” who come for shorter, repeated, periods to Spain. Vicente Rodriguez (2001, 2004) also has suggested the conceptual framework be reconsidered, and Williams and Hall (2002) have broadened the perspective on mobility more generally.

Given these considerations, if not confusions, I suggest calling the phenomenon “affluence mobility”. Mobility does not refer directly either to tourism or migration though it does retain the notion of a pattern of (perhaps quite frequent) physical changes of place (or inhabited space). Affluence is important because the people in question have the economic resources to live their lives in different places.

Legal Frameworks

Affluence mobility in Europe has mostly been associated with crossing from one nation-state to another, which means that northern Europeans who move south change from one cultural, societal, political, economic and legal framework to another. Northern Europeans in Spain not only have to learn the language but also have to learn how to function in a setting with different cultural perceptions of time and different ideas about the relationship between state and citizen than what they are familiar with (Schriewer 2006).

Supranational European institutions also have long sought to encourage intra-state mobility. The 1957 Treaty of Rome establishing the EEC already called for the “free movement of persons, services and capital” (Title III) among its six member states, and the 1992 Maastricht Treaty establishing the European Union states that:

Every citizen of the Union shall have the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States, subject to the limitations and conditions laid down in this Treaty and by the measures adopted to give it effect (Art. 8a).

The above distinction between those who move (tourists) and those who reside (migrants) is reflected here, though it is found in more detailed legislation as well. Thus, one finds the rights of tourists, especially regarding health care, but also the rights and obligations of migrants, defined with respect to the labour market. The third type of stranger, however, is absent in such regulations.

The definition of one place as a person's residence is a central element in welfare state and other regulations. An example, with direct relevance to northern Europeans in Spain, is contained in a 2004 European Parliament regulation on the coordination of social security systems. Definitions in Title 1 state that "*residence* means the place where a person habitually resides" (Art 1(j)) while "*stay* means temporary residence" (Art. 1(k)).⁴ This implies people can travel around and *stay* for short periods in different places, but they will be seen as the *residents* of a particular locale where they "habitually" live. They

can exchange one place of residence for another one, like Simmel's wanderer or stranger, but European legislation does not consider the possibility of having two places of residence at the same time. Against this background, the crucial issue for northern Europeans in Spain is their obligation to register their residence with the authorities.

EU Citizens and Registration Patterns

Almost 30 percent of the British and 53 percent of the German participants said, in a survey we conducted, that they stayed between three and nine months a year in Spain. If one only looks at the duration of the stay, then the UN would call them "international short-term migrants".

Yet many of them come to Spain at different times of the year, stay for a few weeks, go back to their home country, and return again later. This is reflected in travel frequency: 46 percent of the British and almost 39 percent of the Germans said they

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Ill. 1: Affluence mobility is characterized by a high travel activity. (Photo: K. Schriewer.)

flew three or more times a year between Spain and their home country.

This is real transnational mobility, with this new pattern a result of profound changes in transportation modes. The main way of getting to Spain during the 1950s was by car, though it was a lengthy, complex journey from the north because there were no highways at the time. Yet, by the 1950s, the first, few, charter flights were landing in the Balearics. The frequency of flights soon went up and the prices went down, making air travel far more common and affordable.

The way these new strangers reflect about this context can be illustrated by an interview with a British couple:

She: the fares were expensive, whereas now, that the fares are a lot cheaper now, and...

He: And you've got another airport too. (...)

She: It's more like a bus service now, it's like, you know, you just book one-ways. In the old days you could only get seven-day return or a fourteen-day

return, now you can get a one-way, and go for, we go home for the weekends sometimes. If you get a cheap flight, yes, we do! We go to the shops.

He: Or the kids come over...⁵

It has become a part of daily life for many of the new strangers to move between two places, thanks to cheap airfares: the travel itself is no longer time-consuming, expensive, and complicated but is seen instead as an easy, short trip.

Strangers chose places to settle with respect to a readily accessible airport, as well as a good traffic infrastructure with highways. As a result, centres of European affluence mobility emerged near the tourist centres on Mallorca, in the Malaga region, and near Alicante. A specialized economic sector emerged, dedicated to build houses for these strangers. Hundreds of these settlements were built along the coast, nearly exclusively occupied by northern European pensioners. The houses in these "urbanizaciones" are often built in a style that tries to mix Mediterranean and Arabic elements with modern

**This illustration has been omitted
for copyright reasons.**

Ill. 2: Second homes in Mediterranean fantasy architecture in the tourist area near the coast. (Photo: K. Schriewer.)

architecture, in order to reproduce the dream of a carefree life under the sun (Schriewer 2007).

In the last few years, some northern Europeans have left the Spanish coast to settle further inland, largely those who have decided to live more permanently in Spain and not to travel back home so often. They have made a switch into the classic model of migration. These people often buy properties that are normally linked to second homes: old farmhouses or caves which have to be restored.

It is difficult to say how many of the pensioners at the coast do not meet their obligation of registering with the authorities.⁶ Studies come to wildly differing conclusions: One study in Andalusia found 28 percent of the foreigners who should have registered didn't (Rodriguez et al. 1999), while a different study put the number at 80 percent (Mullan 1993). Our own survey found 23 percent of the informants who

stayed more than three months a year saying they were not registered. Instead, they called themselves "long-term tourists", a euphemism that downplays their illegal status.

Furthermore, northern Europeans make use of the differing ways one can be registered. One is to do so at the local level, at the city hall responsible for the particular place of the domicile. Another is to be registered by the agency for foreigners and thus obtain a resident card. Our survey found the British were more than twice as likely as the Germans to do the latter, while the majority of the German respondents preferred to register at city hall instead.

This result is surprising, especially in light of the fact that northern Europeans are quite law-abiding at home. In 1990, Spanish anthropologist Francisco Jurdao wrote, full of astonishment, that such Europeans were proud of the good organization of social

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for copyright reasons.**

Ill. 3: Northern European elderly migrants in front of a ruin they want to restore. (Photo: K. Schriewer.)

| Self-designation | British citizens | German citizens |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Tourist | 1.2% | 6.1% |
| Long-term tourist | 23.1% | 22.7% |
| Registered at the city hall | 39.0% | 52.8% |
| Registered with resident card | 36.1% | 15.3% |
| Lost (not registered) | 0.6% | 3.1% |

Table 1: Self-designation of European seniors in Spain. (Survey carried out in the project Intercultural Communication and European Consciousness.)

life in their home country, attributing it to a strict respect for the law. Yet when they came to Spain, they didn't register with the authorities and seemed to want to live a hidden life in a society that wasn't trying to control them (Jurdao & Sánchez 1990).

There are some potential explanations for this. First, those who move to Spain face what they experience as a confusing and complex legal situation. EU regulations now state that if one wants to go to Spain, one has to apply for a resident card after three months; this was introduced into the Spanish law on foreigners in 2003. Nevertheless, some websites still give the earlier six-month period for registering at the local level.⁷ Some pensioners may not even know they are obligated to apply for a resident card.

Second, practical aspects may be the reason why people avoid registration. Our study included 120 interviews, and a number of interviewees stated that their situation becomes worse once they applied for a resident card.⁸ Some spoke about large bureaucratic hurdles, of inefficiencies in public institutions, the different cultural concepts of time, and of the difficulties in communicating. Problems with driver's licenses, car insurance, and the obligatory technical inspections of automobiles were also mentioned time and time again.

The main problem mentioned, and commonly linked to registration, was regarding health care. This is also an explanation why the British tend more to apply for the resident card while Germans prefer registering at the city hall: the resident card means switching into the Spanish national health care system, one the British see as preferable to their health care system back home, in particular as they get older.

This phenomenon and its consequences are well-known among the British:

And unfortunately there are lots of English people who come over here with very bad health. And they shouldn't be denied to live anywhere, but they are certainly putting a big strain on Spanish hospitals.⁹

In fact, one of the big challenges for the Spanish health care system is how to manage the flows of strangers – non-Europeans as well as Europeans, labour immigrants as well as welfare travellers. Everyone has guaranteed access to health care services in the public system, and among Spanish health care professionals, the phenomenon of northern Europeans registering in order to get full health care coverage is dubbed "health tourism".

The situation is different among German citizens. Most register at the city hall or stay as "long-term tourists" because they want to continue to belong to one of the semi-public German health insurance funds. In interviews, the answers often accounted for it:

... because the benefits abroad are different than in Germany. And if you quit the German health insurance funds (...) well, that was one reason why, um, we said: "Let's keep our German health insurance."¹⁰

In general, Germans think that their health care system holds to a higher standard than the Spanish one, and that leads many of them to pay their German doctor or hospitals a visit: "The whole physi-

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cal [check-up] is done in Germany”, they say.¹¹ But, if you want to be treated in the German health care system, then you also have to be registered in Germany. That means, in everyday practice, that Germans avoid registering in Spain in order to maintain their German health care insurance. They prefer remaining officially registered in Germany, and have a mailbox address either where a family member lives or where they still own property.

The pensioners’ justification can be reduced to two arguments. One says: we’ve been working hard our whole life, have contributed to the welfare and health care systems for many years, and now we have a right to expect good health care in return. The other says: if we live in Spain, we cost less to the system back in Germany because the climate improves our health.

Thus, both British and German residents in Spain have worked out ways to enable them to receive what they consider to be superior health care. The results of our survey, however, also show that those who do not register with the authorities in Spain are quite conscious they are violating the regulations. Personal interest overrides Spanish legislation, EU rules, and the regulatory frameworks in their home countries.

Third, these northern Europeans expect their way of life to be possible within the context of the EU. There is a common expectation that the EU is obligated to create not only a common economic market but also a common social space. One German couple we interviewed told me of their difficulties with their German public health care insurance, and the man concluded by saying:

Something must surely change in the next years, in terms of the EU, for it is the case, one can’t on the one hand say that we are united Europe and that we will become economically strong, and have a free choice of where to work – while in reality nothing of the sort is true.¹²

EU citizens should have the right to move without restrictions and the possibility to maintain all their welfare rights in their home country.

Reference to the EU may be another kind of jus-

tification, but it shows as well that these northern Europeans do take this supranational institution into account and are aware that it is one of the actors determining the framework of mobility. During fieldwork, we met various people who had sent petitions to the European Ombudsman or to the European Court, the most popular of which might be the one a certain Mister Phelan sent, asking for a reform of Spanish registration practices for those who live in or between two European countries (Schriewer & Rodes García 2006). The EU is no longer seen as a purely administrative unit but instead as a political actor, if not arbitrator. This is not European consciousness but instead the first step in a process like that of ‘putting a question to parliament,’ and in Althusser’s (1974) sense, also asking for recognition (García Jiménez & Schriewer 2005).

None of these reasons alone explain the registration pattern of northern Europeans in Spain. But all of them together show that affluence mobility is an issue in which different national and European laws or regulations, when they intersect with individual interests of citizens, create a complex and difficult interaction that requires new political solutions as well as new theoretical proposals. Will the nation-states involved, and the EU, have the necessary political will to change this situation and work out a legal framework to take multi-local ways of life into account? At least in theoretical terms, we need to create a concept transcending Simmel’s two types, of the wanderer and of the stranger, making it possible to understand the new strangers in the European context. That means that we have to investigate the impact of the EU on emerging forms of everyday culture.

Notes

- 1 The data come from a project on “Intercultural Communication and European Consciousness”, under the direction of Schriewer, begun in 2004 at the Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia (Spain) and now being carried out at the Universidad de Murcia.
- 2 “Estos extraños turistas que huyen del sol industrial se podrían comparar con los pájaros migratorios que huyen de los países fríos en invierno”.

- 3 "El chalet es símbolo de una instalación definitiva en el país, un cuidado extremo de la decoración de la casa, de su orden y limpieza, del cuidado del jardín; el chalet implica una carga emotiva que no puede variar de un año a otro ni cambiar de marco." In the 1970s, 'el chalet' meant something like a holiday home or one located in the country side; nowadays it refers to a single-family home.
- 4 Corrigenda Regulation (EC) No 883/2004. In: Official Journal of the European Union, L200/1 or at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2004/l_200l_20020040607en00010049.pdf [consulted 15.08.2007].
- 5 Interview GB 009.
- 6 None of the data sources help, whether official (as in emigration statistics), semi-public (information on pensions), or private (efforts to try, using water consumption or data on waste management), to calculate the difference between officially registered inhabitants and the true number of inhabitants.
- 7 http://www.spanishpropertyworld.com/obtaining_a_residence_permit_in_spain.htm (15.05.2006): "They are allowed to remain for six months, by the end of which time they should be in possession of a residence card (Residencia)."
- 8 It is hard to judge to what extent these are justification narratives (Lehmann 1980).
- 9 Interview GB 002.
- 10 Interview D 004: "weil die Leistungen im Ausland anders sind, als die, als die deutschen Leistungen. Und wenn man sich total abmeldet da aus der Krankenkasse, (...) jedenfalls das war mit ein Grund, ehm, dass wir gesagt haben: 'Wir bleiben in Deutschland versichert weiterhin.'"
- 11 Interview D 005: "der gesamte Durchcheck geht über Deutschland".
- 12 Interview D 005: "Da wird sich auch in den nächsten Jahren mit Sicherheit was ändern müssen, EU-mäßig, denn das ist ja, kann auf der einen Seite nicht sagen, wir sind ein vereintes Europa und wir werden also wirtschaftsmäßig stark und dann eine freie Arbeitsplatzwahl und in Wirklichkeit, das stimmt ja alles gar nicht, was da ist."

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