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**Lifestyle Migrations in Mediterranean
Context. The Future for Depopulated
Areas?**

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Lifestyle Migrations in Mediterranean Context. The Future for Depopulated Areas?

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Abstract

The “lifestyle flows” is distinguish for being volunteer dislocations, normally associated to a group of individuals of retirement age, having good monetary dividends, as well as a high level of education and seeking other country to live based on a hedonistic life philosophy connected to geographic factors like the climate, landscape, dynamic of the local communities, etc. This generalized definition is in consonance with the Mediterranean migration flows, namely of the Northern Europeans moving to countries like Spain, Greece, Italy, Malta, Turkey, or Croatia.

In the Portuguese case it has been intensified, yet in relative form, the presence of these retired or at the end of their careers foreigners, who face some low density rural areas, scarred by depopulation, as locations with high life quality. So, one question can be posed: are these lifestyle migrants the future of these depopulated areas?

This communication intends to discuss the meaning of “lifestyle migrants/migrations”. Case studies at an international scale will be subsequently analysed, with special focus on the Mediterranean, especially Portugal, aiming to understand where, how and why certain lifestyle migrant communities settled in some geographic points. The main conclusions will focus the importance of these migrants to the demographic, economic, social and environmental revitalization of the low density regions in the Mediterranean context.

Keywords: Lifestyle migrations; low density regions; ruralophilia; Mediterranean.

Defining Lifestyle Migrants/Lifestyle Migrations

“Lifestyle migrations” is a very complex concept. The mobility is related with a specific need that goes far beyond the material scope, involving the quest for means to earn (more) Money or obtain other kind of assets, like for example an own house. Torkington (2012) says that they are clearly not motivated by economic or political factors; they are not post-industrial migrants seeking employment; they are not transnational migrants of corporate and intellectual elites. However, like everyone else, they seek a better quality of life in the place of destination, not being fully satisfied with the whole everyday life in the place of origin. There are two main questions to answer.

The first: who are these individuals? O’Reilly (2007) defines “lifestyle migrants” as relative affluent individuals, moving either part or full time to countries where the cost of living and the price of properties are cheaper. O’Reilly and Benson (2009) affirm that this specific migratory movement is done with escape from somewhere and something, an escape to self-fulfilment and a new life. Is a recreation, restoration and/or a rediscovery of oneself, of personal potential our true desires.

The second question: what do they seek? These individuals coming from North and Central Europe countries move to live in countries of the Southern Europe, aiming to enjoy their retirements. The main reason is the weather: smooth winters and high number of sun hours in the summer. Besides, the lower cost of life makes possible to maximize the earnings from the pension, for it is easy to purchase houses and real estate, remodeling them according to the local housing aesthetics.

O’Reilly (2007) mentions that many are retired/late-life migrants, i.e., retired elderly, economically inactive. However, there is the growing complementary trend of these flows being grown by youngsters in active age, in full professional career.

Besides, the author draws attention that it are not cases of “second homes”. Independently of the time spent in each one, the “second residence”, in the migration location, becomes the main, not always from an official point of view, but from a symbolic point of view. Sometimes it becomes the only residence, if the residential ties with the country of origin are broken, thus Torkington (2010) doubting they can be called “residential tourists”. And as for the time of residence being varied, it can be motivated by the presence of family in the place of origin, but the weather in both migration poles, by personal decisions or professional demands.

Nagamoto (2008) and Morales (2012) defend that it should be distinguished the “domestic lifestyle migrations” from the “international lifestyle migrations”. In the first case it includes especially the retired, whose permanence in both migration poles is seasonal, and whose life project is to dislocate to territories with environmental characteristics and favorable climate to a relaxed lifestyle. In the second case, besides this perspective, it is sought business opportunities, as well as good education conditions, hence being made by a younger group, still active from a professional point of view. The authors

mentions that the Mediterranean life (cuisine, life, slow pace of life, outdoor living, among other aspects) is a dream attractive for lifestyle migrants, mostly for Northern and Centre Europeans, whose geographic proximity between migration poles is an advantage.

Lifestyle Migrants and the Ruralophilic Idyllic in the Mediterranean

In a general way, theoretical reflections and case studies about lifestyle migrations conclude that the environmental component, associated to the way of life of the autochthone communities is a determinant factor to the choice of certain territories as destination of mobility.

It is the case of Turkey, in which Sudas (2011, 2012) made research about the case of Marmaris and Alanya, highlighting the presence of lifestyle migrants from Germany and the United Kingdom, as well as from countries of the Scandinavian Peninsula, whose rationale to move to Turkey was related to a lower lifestyle, the hospitality of the Turks, having been highlighted the weather and the landscape (“enjoying sun and sea”) as primordial elements in the decision of migrating – push – bearing in mind the specificities at this level offered by the Turkish territory – pull.

Also Lenz (2006) reinforce the importance of local communities and the environment through the landscape, mentioning the case study of Crete, in Greece. Yet in a initially touristic context, the fixation of foreigners from the North and Centre Europe was by motives that exceeded sea, sun and sand”. The sophisticated culture of the past, the historic heritage of the Greek civilizations were influent motives for the settlement. However this idyllic perspective of history and culture was reinforced by locals and by their lifestyle, perceived as “simple, archaic and close to the nature”.

O’Reilly (2009) estimates that about 600.000 British live in Spain, mostly on the Mediterranean coast, although it is estimated that this number only represents a third of those who really live most of the year in that Southern European country. In the case study of British living in France, O’Reilly (2007) verifies that the main mobile is related with a search of a relaxed life, being that they face countryside as a privileged location to live this idyllic rural. This idea of rural comes from a construction of a territorial image of places based in preconceived ideas that do not correspond to what these spaces are. Individuals move to live in locations with less population, less criminality, less pollution, less traffic, for some groups privilege rural areas of low densities as locations to settle.

Morén-Alegret and Solana (2004) and Morén-Alegret (2004, 2008) understand this “ruralophilia” as a specific form of topophilia. Considering the conception of Tuan (1974), the concept refers to the affective bonds developed between people and places, depending on each other’s personal experience. In this context, ruralophilia concerns this idea, only materializing the space it concerns – rural areas – as in an antagonist but complementary vision regarding “urbophobia”. This rural charm is also mentioned by Solana (2003)

and Velasco (2006), being that this last author highlights the environmental component as justifying factor of the residential preferences of certain population segments. The study of the increase of the population growth rate in some Andalusian natural parks (between 1981-2001) allowed to understand the existence of “naturbanization” process, which is defined by the attraction made by some rural municipalities integrated in protected natural spaces, over some alien population segments.

But that feeling of ruralophilia was also based on other two assumptions: on the one hand, the traditional character of the way of life of the local communities (in some case connected to subsistence agriculture); on the other hand, the weak demographic concentration – low densities – faced as a differentiating territorial advantage. Having these assumptions as base, it will be conducted the study of the Portuguese case, bearing in mind the case of a territory traditionally receiving lifestyle migrants – the Algarve – and one with a relatively recent phenomenon – the case of the Sierra of São Mamede.

Two Case Studies in Portugal: the Algarve and Sierra of São Mamede

The methodology approach of these two cases is made in a differentiated way. In the case of the Algarve it will be had into account the works of Torkington (2010, 2012), which is based in direct empirical observation, as well as statistical data from the Portuguese Institute of Statistics and in questionnaires by inquiry by interview to the studied population.

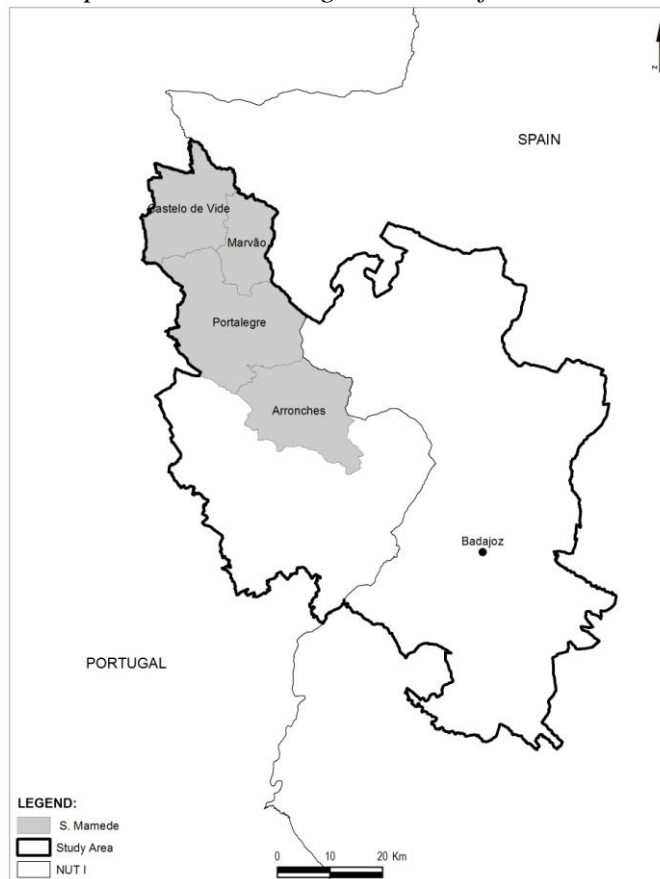
In what the Sierra of São Mamede is concerned, the differences are considerable. While in the previous the author defined the group of lifestyle migrants as the study goal, in this case the goal was to study immigrants established in the sub-region of Alto Alentejo, in comparison with the other side of the border (sub-region of Badajoz, Spain).

Figure 1. Study Area and Study Cases: Algarve and Sierra of São Mamede



Source : Self-Made (2014)

Figure 2. *Municipalities that Belong to Sierra of São Mamede Study Case*



Source : Self-Made (2014)

Although the initially established purpose was achieved, it was highlighted the presence of a considerable group of lifestyle migrants, having into account that their characteristics correspond to what has already been defined in the first point of this article. It were conducted thirty three questionnaires by inquiry of structures base, having the collection method been the sample by “snowball effect”. It were inquired individuals of British, German and Dutch nationalities, the predominant nationalities in Sierra of São Mamede, all with higher academic training, having been identified a group of retired people, in identical proportion to the individuals of active age, that came to develop their own businesses (has some retired also do) in the field of Mediterranean agriculture (olive, wine) and cattle (bovine and ovine), as in rural tourism.

Lifestyle Migrations in Algarve

Torkington (2010) mentions that in 1980 it were living in the Algarve about 2.500 British, having that number increased to 20.000 in 2005. However it is estimated that this is quite behind the reality, for it is projected that this value only translates about one third of the UK population settled in the analyzed area. But it not only this the nationality that prevails, as well as many Germans, Dutch, Belgians, Irish, Swedish, Danish and Finnish. Many chose

not to change the permanent residence to Portugal given they still have rather strong relations with the country of origin, namely at a family and possession of goods level (for example, own house). The author draws attention to the need of case studies to be conducted in context of group/territory, namely in terms of impacts for the regional development, community perspective (for example, the importance of the association movement) and individual (for the study of the rationale of the dislocation), information networks, connection to the country of origin, descendant generation (the case of the education of lifestyle migrants' children), contacts of these foreigners with the autochthone local communities, amongst other subjects. The idea is to perceive the dynamics of this group of migrants, as well as clarification of leads for the constitution of policies and planning strategies, which include actively the figure of lifestyle migrants as intervenient agents in economy and society at a local and regional scale.

Later Torkington (2012, draws attention for the concept of “glocalization”. According to the author, glocalization projects can imply the meshing of the global with the local in new and imaginative ways. There is a departure regarding the local community, for example in terms of housing typology, or by the immigrant associations or education concept of their children (attending specific schools, at the image of the country of origin). However, the speech about immigration and the project revolves around the principles of the Push-Pull Theory, in which are emphasized the negative factors of the place of origin, opposed the positive of the location of arrival. In this case, the interviewed by the author defined the country (UK) as depressive, cold, wet, grey, hectic, busy, extortionate; expensive, among other aspects. Regarding the Algarve and the location of settlement they perceived it as “perfect, ideal, lovely, pretty, beautiful, fantastic, wonderful, warm, hot, sunny, bright, clear, relaxed, slow, peaceful, quiet, save, reasonable, cheap”, among others. These characteristics are reviewed and assumed by the lifestyle migrants in the Sierra of São Mamede, who, apart from the climate, highlight other elements that defined the settlement location of the defined migration project.

Hedonism, Landscape and Low Densities: The Migratory Project of Lifestyle Migrants in Sierra of São Mamede

Having this research been widely studied in the scope of a wider investigation and the results presented in several contexts, as can be verified in the last two bibliography references indicated in this article. Thus it will be presented a general synthesis of the main conclusions, which is centered in the aspects that become the territory – Sierra of São Mamede – differentiating regarding other spaces, and that were decisive for the settlement of lifestyle migrants in this area of Portugal.

The climate issue is the first cause, of general scope, indicated for the settlement in Portugal. The smoothness of winter and the high number of average hours of sun daily are aspects that the immigrants mentioned as decisive for the choice of a Mediterranean country to live and work.

More specific in territorial terms, they mention the environmental quality and the aesthetics of the regional in particular, as the primary cause for the specific choice of the region of the country as migration destination. That was noticed in this immigrant community, whose ideal of quality of life, as they mentioned, was much based on the idyllic idea of contact with Nature. All, without exception, agreed that they found in these municipalities of the Sierra of São Mamede Natural Park, proper conditions to achieve their migration goals. There are three points that are highlighted and that, besides justifying the choice and settlement, are in the base of intention of partial permanence, or even definitive.

The first concerns the guarantees provided by the park in what preservation of the environment and territorial planning is concerned, given the space is comprehended by the legislation in terms of construction rules. If it is certain that the trace and aesthetic of the houses cannot be changed (at least the façade), nor establish any kind of economic activity, it has the guarantee that, as mentioned, “this space will not become a city”. They value the rural landscape for the aesthetic part, for the way it has been preserved the nature (flora and fauna), for still having elements of a traditional lifestyle, namely the practice of subsistence agriculture by the elderly local population, for keeping the trace of the traditional houses of the region. The possibility of living a quite daily life with the absence of constraints associated to urban areas (for example, traffic jams) is another point they focus when inquired.

The second, in part approached in the previous point, concerns the housing and farm land. Associated to the landscape and environmental quality these foreigners highlight the low price (and availability) for sale of real estate/land, compared to the ones practiced in the country of origin, was a factor that much conditioned the choice of these municipalities for residence. There were therefore, yet spontaneously, created the conditions to the formation of a real estate market where, by the offer’s side, there were owners with no interest in keeping the houses and, of the demand’s side, foreigners with enough economical ability to acquire and recover these assets.

The existence of an embryonic social network of German, Dutch and British immigrants residing in this region of the country since the 1980’s, worked as generator of information. Besides it is noticed some attention of the real estate market in this sense, with options of sales and services (for example, support at an official level) directed to this segment of clients. In the field work it was confirmed that one of the main Portuguese real estate companies (Remax) has hired an English professional (descendant of Portuguese parents) to attract and contact with this type of public, apart from having found one real estate company /Extremadura Properties) whose owners are a Dutch couple living in Marvão and an autochthone living in Albuquerque (Spain, Autonomous Region of Extremadura, Badajoz municipality), who run the business, especially with an offer or real estate meant for the market segment of Northern/Center European immigrants.

The third point is related to the work developed. It is estimated that half of the contingent is still active, for they continue to perform work functions,

although different from those performed in the country of origin. They are individuals whose age strip is, on average, in the 40/50 years old, university training and, having achieved the top of their careers, decided to change the type of activity, privileging the contact with Nature, hence investing in own businesses in the subsector of agriculture (olive and wine), cattle (ovine and bovine) and tourism (agro tourism, bed and breakfast, camping, etc). In this last case they use the involving natural resources at a local scale (for example, by offering programs that include walks through rural paths, sale of regional food products), but also promote the national specificities such as *fado* (for example, organizing theme nights). This is the general trend, although having found punctual cases of immigrants who manage to keep the job in the place of origin in a teleworking system (the case of a designer in Marvão) or that have invested in the subsector of health (the case of a dentist in the municipality of Castelo de Vide). They highlight the fact of being able to control their own schedules, working with the rhythm and pace they define, annulling the pressures they had when depending of an employer. Besides they feel more accomplished for being able to work in contact with Nature, in functions with more physical demand, but for which they are not academically ready. In the case of agriculture and cattle breeding, this challenge is being suppressed successfully thanks to research work made before immigrating (for example reading, participating in workshops, etc.), by trial and error and also by establishing relations of neighborhood with the autochthones who practice subsistence agriculture, and that transmit knowledge about the dynamics of Mediterranean cultures.

The personal safety and of the assets is a widely mentioned factor by all immigrated groups in this region of the country, allied to the perception of low levels of criminality.

Also the human dimension deserves highlight, in what the autochthones is concerned. Although these immigrants assume living outside the population agglomerates by their own will, that has not stopped the establishment of relations of friendship with the local community. They consider that the low population densities verified in the region are a very positive point for, in their opinion, they give the place(s) the character of tranquility, quiet, safety, contributing in a certain way for the maintenance of the natural and human Mediterranean landscape. To be understood in this context the concept of “low densities” in a quantitative perspective, referring to the shortness of resident population, jobs, goods and services, etc. “shortness of company resources, human capital, relational capital, population and urban dimension” (Martins, 2010).

Did the expectations that these lifestyle migrants had regarding the territory, before migrating, come to verify in reality? By the presented assumptions, and confronted with the question, almost all immigrants answered yes, being that some mentioned to have overcome, positively, the initially define expectations for the migration project. Spalding (2013), when studying the lifestyle migrants in Bocas del Toro, Panama, mentions the issue of territorial image. By idealizing their new home, the individuals sometimes

build an unfocused image of what is the geographic and social reality of the location of migration destination, the case based on the “paradise islands”. According to the author, in her case study, it leads to the occurrence of conflicts between natives and foreigners, resulting of that gap between the idealized and the everyday difficulties, reflecting in a tense relation between foreigners and natives. But in the case of lifestyle migrants in Sierra of São Mamede, recognized by all – foreigners and local community- the presence of these lifestyle migrants has brought large benefits in terms of local development.

Impacts of Lifestyle Migrants in Territorial Development: A Synthesis

In the case studies previously analyzed, all the authors recognize that the presence of this group of foreigners generates marking consequences in the territories and local communities.

Sudas (2011, 2012) in the Turkish case study of Marmaris and Alanya mentions that the presence of lifestyle migrants generated visible impacts in the places of residence. The author highlights the creation of linguistic landscapes, resulting from the relatively hermetic presence of the groups in question (British, Dutch, German, etc.). Besides, the real estate market adapted to the demands of these immigrants, having organized part of the market in function of these clients. There were created locations for these alien communities: cafes, bars, immigrant associations, teaching establishments, cemeteries.

Lenz (2006), in the case of Crete, in Greece, mentions that in some locations the autochthone identity was lost, mostly by the effects of globalization. Says the author that what is consumed as originally Greek or Cretan is thereby frequently as a transnational product. That means that the loss of territorial identity may condition the choice of Crete as destination for lifestyle migrants, both at national scale –choosing by other migration destinations – and at a local scale – new settlements, in repulsive areas for the locals, but where the initial characteristics of the landscape and communities are maintained.

They take the role of producers, by the investment in own businesses, they bring dynamics to subsectors as agriculture, valuing Mediterranean autochthone cultures (olive, wine) as well as introducing viable novelties (for example in cattle breeding, where some Dutch breed limousine cattle). With the tourism activity, by promoting a strong relation between the environment and the tourist (in most cases foreigners), give visibility the regional specificities, which end up being divulged across borders by the testimony of those who try it and advises the services that are associated (housing, restaurant, etc.). It is certain that they do not create job opportunities for the nationals, given they run small businesses, however it is a group of individuals who do not put pressure on the local market and, therefore, will not compete with the nationals.

Besides, they become consumers of goods and services in the local market(s). To be highlighted the case of real estate, where the lease (in an initial stage, before the definitive settlement) and the purchase of

houses/properties, injects capital in local vendors and owners, as well as giving dynamics the markets of small builders both for the purchase of construction products and for hiring services.

In this context, these immigrants take the important role of rehabilitators of the housing heritage, providing the locals where they live (when do not have) of basic infrastructures (electricity, water, telephone, internet, etc.) as well as the landscape itself. Those who have a working activity use the lands for agricultural activity or tourism, being that all of them mentioned (active and retired) to practice subsistence agriculture (of biological character) for house consumption. It is noticed this utility care, a care of aesthetic character with the own landscape, by the (re)planting of agricultural autochthone agricultural and forestry species.

Conclusion: Are Lifestyle Migrations Flows the Future to Depopulated Areas in Some Areas of the Mediterranean?

The reflection about the case studies conducted by the several authors and the presentation and discussion of the particular case study – Sierra of São Mamede –concludes that the presence of lifestyle migrants in depopulated areas, in some areas of the Mediterranean – the case of the Iberian Peninsula in general and Portugal in particular.

It must be mentioned that this investigation took place in 2010, having been publically presented in 2012. Having into account all the immigrants included in the study, it was verified that in some nationalities, mostly Brazilians and Eastern Europeans, there was a retraction of the flows. That is, work migrations have stopped, given that the severe economic crisis lead to the regional work fabric could no take any more labor force. However, lifestyle migrations have not only continued but also increased, having this contingent grown 14% in a two years period. Taking this fact of the impacts of the presence of these lifestyle migrants are very positive for the maintenance of the landscape and environmental quality of this Portuguese area, as well as for the own local economies, it is urgent that policies of territorial management at a regional and local scale include, and even attract, these foreigners to settle and participate actively in the process of regional development.

There are several recommendations in this sense. It is very important to provide the workers of the local management organisms and other similar services, of specific competences (professional training) to give answers to the solicitations of the immigrant population; bet in the logic of enlightenment and help to immigrants, to make official processes more agile; make processes regarding buying and selling real estate more agile, as well as establishing businesses, through opening specific public offices with specialized help in this area.

In what lifestyle migrants is concerned, it would be important to reflect about some aspects. One of them would be to bet in teaching Portuguese and Spanish languages, from the creation/widening of the language teaching

network. Also to study about viability of two business areas meant for immigrants: the first – opening the Badajoz regional airport (Spain, in the border with Sierra of São Mamede) to a larger diversity of international destinations; the second – development of a network of elderly care (house support, nursing homes and continuous care), meant to the specific contingent of elderly lifestyle migrants in order to promote the maintenance of the permanence (with life quality) in the territory.

For the political decision makers, it is important to understand that the character of “low territorial density” as a positive resource, a factor of attraction for immigrants who seek locations with such characteristics to live, work or enjoy their retirements. From that assumption, draw a strategy of “territorial marketing” for, in a sustainable way, capture immigrant population (and also national) for these depopulated areas.

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