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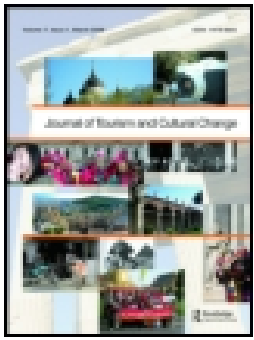
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Practices in-between: Norwegian long-term visitors in Mediterranean Spain

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ABSTRACT

During initial ethnographic fieldwork among Norwegian long-term visitors in the province of Alicante in Spain, these visitors expressed concern about the manner in which they were portrayed in the Norwegian news media, in contrast to their own images as holidaymakers. This problem is partly epistemological, since 'long-term visitors' were uncertain about their status and role. For instance, on sightseeing tours, sports events or hiking trips, they were tourists. At other times, for instance, when dealing with local authorities, they saw themselves as different from pure tourists. The Norwegian long-termers stated that their stay in Spain was far more multifaceted than what had been portrayed in the media, that they participated in cultural and social activities, and that they had many points of contact with Spanish society. The Norwegian visitors wondered how a more accurate and multi-vocal image of holidaymakers and long-termers could be represented. The concepts of local knowledge, adaptation and discourse will be used here to problematise this timely topic in tourism research on roles and images. Developing a more comprehensive view of long-term visitors will focus not only on their own situation, but also on their relations with other visitors, the host population, and Spanish authorities.

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Long-term visitor; tourist role; lifestyle migration; adaptation; discourse; Spain

Introduction

Empirical studies indicate that large international flows in different settings have blurred the distinctions among tourists, sojourners, amenity migrants and foreigners (Jacobsen, Selstad, & Nogués-Pedregal, 2009). Consequently, many people who temporarily relocate internationally may be seen as more than tourists but less than immigrants (Lauring, Selmer, & Jacobsen, 2014; Nash, 1970). Studies of tourism and international leisure travel thus run a constant risk of stereotyping their subject due to the frequent use of simplified images both by people involved in travel activities as well as the media reporting on them (Pi-Sunyer, 1989; Selstad, 2012). Many of these simplifications are directed at the role of the tourist, and at its imagined forms in collective representations as presented in daily practices. This new discursive situation resembles the Moebius strand of free association (Nogués-Pedregal, 2007). In fact, long-term visitors to a foreign country may carry all of

these roles at the same time. This article argues the need for more complex and nuanced analyses of the adaptation of long-term visitors both as residents and tourists, based on empirical case material from Norwegian nationals with long-term stays in Costa Blanca, Spain.

The socio-anthropological study of long-term visitors, known in the academic literature as 'residential tourists' and 'lifestyle migrants', has long been a research topic (Aledo, Jacobsen, & Selstad, 2012; Aubert, 1969; Casado-Díaz, 1999; Mantecón & Huete, 2011; Mazon, 2006; O'Reilly, 2000; Williams, King, & Warnes, 2004). One of the main points of discussion is how long-term visitors are discursively and practically constructed as having a role 'in-between' the ephemerality of tourists and the permanence of residents (Haug, Dann, & Mehmetoglu, 2007, p. 217). During ethnographic fieldwork in Costa Blanca, many long-term visitors expressed concern about the manner in which they were portrayed in the Norwegian news media. Informants were eager to show that their stay in Spain was far more nuanced and dialogical than portrayed. They emphasised that they engage both in touristic leisure activities and in everyday household duties and obligations. Most of them maintain relations with their home social space by means of regular flights, mobile phones, social media and meetings with compatriots, while quite a few also have Spanish friends and acquaintances. In different and active ways, they adapt to being in-between tourists and long-term residents. Similar concerns about misrepresentations have been reported for Swedish 'retirement migrants' in Spain (Gustafson, 2001, p. 908).

This great concern with painting a more accurate picture of their situation in Spain appears in the ethnographic material here in a variety of ways. A stereotypical image of the visitors is of estranged tourists experiencing 'pseudo-events' (Boorstin, 1961). Such depictions relate to problems of self-identification among Norwegian residents, since they did not know how to label their status and define their role as non-Spaniards against the usual discourse fostered by the news media and quotidian language. In some instances, they saw themselves neither as tourists nor as residents, while other renderings perceived them as both (Gustafson, 2002; Helset, Lauvli, & Sandlie, 2004). The situation of long-term visitors becomes part of a wider discussion about the relationship among tourism, residence, and migration. More composite approaches are necessary to describe the complex and changing situation of long-term visitors in the interstitial space between tourism and migration (Gustafson & Cardozo, 2017; Huete, 2008).

The ethnographic research conducted for this study consisted of longitudinal short-term fieldwork conducted between 2007 and 2017, mainly in October and November but also in March, April, and May. The research methods combine qualitative and quantitative techniques and include participant observation as well as informal and formal interviews. In addition, printed information in Spain, local and national Norwegian media, and internet sources were compiled, and photographs taken. All information was anonymised, since the respondents were not asked their name, address or other identifying characteristics. Participant observation and interviews were conducted by the first author in outdoor cafes, restaurants, hotels, a compatriot club and an airport. Of 33 partially structured interviews lasting more than 30 minutes, 14 were with women and 26 with men, including seven couples, ranging in age from 38 to 78. In addition, numerous shorter interviews and conversations were held with Norwegian people from all walks of life, a few Spaniards and people from other countries. The risk of gender bias by the male interviewer

was ameliorated by paying special attention to the situation of women, especially those who were single, since this was represented as a difficult situation by many others, notably by couples. Still, the study has some limitations as most informants were Norwegian pensioners. The research is part of a collaborative effort between scholars in Norway and Spain who are studying Norwegian long-term visitors in Costa Blanca.

The following pages will present material on how Norwegians with long-term stays in Spain adapt to social ambiguity through their daily practices in different social settings. This will include a discussion of how simplistic stereotypes of them in the Norwegian news media and in other contexts, bring a discursive contrast to the complexity and variability of their lives and practices in Spain.

The setting in Costa Blanca, Spain

Norwegian holidaymaking in Spain has a long tradition and has grown with the development of package tourism from the 1960s. After 1980, large areas along the Mediterranean coast were opened for international and domestic holiday home developments, becoming core areas for long-term visitors or 'residential tourists' (Barke, Towner, & Newton, 1996). By 2000, housing developments for residential tourists had become huge.

Most of the ethnographic fieldwork for this study was carried out in the northern part of Costa Blanca, in the towns of l'Alfàs del Pi and l'Albir, both in the municipality of l'Alfàs del Pi. This was supplemented with a few visits to the neighbouring towns of Benidorm and Altea, all located in the Spanish province of Alicante. The municipality l'Alfàs del Pi has roughly 20,000 inhabitants and covers 18.8 square kilometres (Carnicer, 1991, p. 37). The old main town in the municipality l'Alfàs del Pi lies three kilometres inland, while the new coastal town of l'Albir and much of the surrounding orchards and farm land were developed as residential tourism urbanisations from 1975 onwards. Today, international residents here outnumber the Spanish population, though it is difficult to obtain precise figures of foreign nationals in the municipality of l'Alfàs.

Informants estimated that there were 10,000 to 20,000 Norwegians on long-term stay in Costa Blanca each year. In the municipality of l'Alfàs del Pi, 6000 to 7000 long-term winter season visitors were estimated. One problem with the figures for long-term visitors is that foreign arrivals do not always register with the Spanish authorities if they own housing or reside locally, so that official figures are incomplete (Helset et al., 2004).

Norwegian entrepreneurs participated in many of the early residential tourism projects in l'Alfàs. The main village of l'Alfàs del Pi is very old and has a complex history little known to most Norwegian informants. Their narrative starting point was the Urbanización Escandinavia located in an area 'discovered' by a North Norwegian sailor in the 1960s, who was soon followed by compatriots and other Scandinavians who gave it its name. Another inland urbanización involved Norwegian and Spanish builders in 1978 and was marked by the establishment of a health facility for Norwegians with rheumatic ailments. Similar health resorts were set up elsewhere along the Spanish Mediterranean littoral and it is one of the main reasons for retirement tourism in Spain (Hurtado Garcia, 2013).

The next stage was the development for residential tourism purposes of the coastal area named l'Albir, mainly after 1990. Interestingly, knowledgeable informants disagreed on when the seashore became a destination for holidaymakers and second home owners. One long-time resident claimed that, except for a few old houses, everything in l'Albir, the

everybody could be seen as a tourist, but in downtown shopping only foreign visitors might be seen in that light. In a public office or workplace, a person would no longer be a tourist but rather an employee or a client, with the rights of a citizen. Also, a role might change within a context, such as entering an office while appearing as a holiday-maker but becoming a resident when asking about taxation laws or other issues.

The challenge would be to foster more flexible and nuanced views of particular roles. For instance, the rights and duties of holidaymakers sometimes appear vague when compared to those of immigrants and citizens, partly because the tourist role is often perceived as transient and unsettled (Cohen, 1974). Tourist obligations and rights need to be considered more carefully by practitioners and authorities. For instance, in the EU all arrivals from member nations have citizen rights, whether tourists or residents, something that is easily forgotten in a stereotypical view of tourism. The distinction between one type of person and another often runs the risk of exaggeration and stereotyping, while people constantly move between roles (Selstad, 2012). Norwegians in Spain might be leisure travellers who live full lives as residents and individuals.

A final emic perspective to be noted is Zygmunt Bauman's thoughts about 'fluid' late modernity, where tourists are viewed as detached from their surroundings while experiencing a lack or 'looseness' of social ties with local people in the places they arrive in (Franklin, 2003). Unlike the 'liquid' metaphor, demonstrating local knowledge and familiarity with l'Alfàs del Pi become an important marker of adaptation among long-termers. The main observation about the Norwegian long-term visitors in Costa Blanca is that there are extensive individual and social variations in how people adapt. This concerns every aspect of existence, from language use to acquaintances, while most informants have many international relationships, including Spanish contacts (Jacobsen et al., 2009). There is no clear correlation between lengths of stay or familiarity with Spain and the satisfaction with or success of individual adaptations. Many long-term visitors can try to become involved in Spanish society or to live entirely in a tourism context, while most adaptations are transitional and fall somewhere in between.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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