



*2<sup>nd</sup> International Workshop on Lifestyle Migration and Residential Tourism  
Madrid: March 23-25, 2011*

## **Contested Spatialities of Lifestyle Migration Public policies, local democracy and global market forces**

**Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels**

University of Kent at Brussels

E-Mail: A.K.von-Koppenfels[at]kent.ac.uk

### **ABSTRACT**

#### **Americans Abroad: “Expats,” Immigrants or Something Else?**

This paper critically examines the case of Americans living abroad, analyzing both reasons for their migration as well as examining their level of integration.<sup>1</sup> It will look at Americans living in Western Europe and explore to what extent (or not) they can be seen as “expatriates,” as immigrants, or should be categorized altogether differently.

The paper will have both theoretical and empirical components. It will draw on literature on expatriates and on lifestyle migration as well as on past fieldwork I have carried out with Americans in Brussels and ongoing fieldwork in Berlin, Paris and London.

The paper will start with a discussion of the terms “expatriate” and “immigrants,” the implications of the use of the terms and the underlying assumptions. “Expatriate” has become conceptually stretched, to use Giovanni Sartori’s term, over the years, shifting from a fairly narrow understanding to a much broader one. Today, nearly all literature referring to Americans overseas uses the concept of “expatriates,” without necessarily questioning the assumptions or implications of that term as applied to Americans in a range of host countries. The paper will then draw on fieldwork to give some insights into the diversity of Americans abroad and then conclude by drawing conclusions about migration and mobility from the case of Americans.

While many Americans **are** expatriates and/or lifestyle migrants, this paper will argue that we can gain an even stronger conceptual understanding of these terms and phenomena if we differentiate among American migrants. Some are clearly typical expatriates (a term which will be defined), some are clearly lifestyle migrants, and others are more typical migrants who demonstrate both successes and challenges in integration (also a term which will be defined).

Not all Americans can be categorized as lifestyle migrants: I have spoken with self-defined “health care refugees,” those who are (or were, prior to President Obama’s health care legislation) ineligible for health care in the US on the grounds of a pre-existing condition. I have spoken with gay men who call themselves “Love Exiles” because they can only live with their same-sex European partners in Europe, where foreign partners in same-sex unions are granted residence permits, unlike the situation in the United States. By examining cases such as these, and by differentiating among the three categories of immigrants, expatriates and lifestyle migrants, each can be given more conceptual strength.

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<sup>1</sup> Although an imprecise term, “Americans” is a common term used to refer to US citizens and, as such, will be used here.

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*Centre of Human and Social Sciences, Spanish National Research Council  
Department of Political Science & International Relations, Autonomous University of Madrid*



Ultimately, I hope that the paper will demonstrate a wide diversity of Americans abroad, contributing to a broadened understanding of migration and mobility. The paper will also touch on the concept of transnationalism – perhaps another aspect of the concept of multiple places of residence/participation.