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

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ABSTRACT

The strategies of German ‘snowbirds’ in Spain: The life-world(s) of German retreat migrants. Transcultural patterns of identity in a Spanish town

My PhD project focuses on Torrox, a small town on Spain’s Costa del Sol. Torrox is considered the biggest German “colony” abroad. Estimations assume that more than 10.000 Germans live on the coastline of this small town, which was constructed by a German contractor in the 1970ies, whereas only 2500 are registered in the local offices. Most of the Germans are retired and demonstrate a variety of migrations between Spain and Germany. Based on 25 guideline-based interviews with German retirees and 6 interviews with experts in the municipality of Torrox I have analyzed the patterns of group identity produced by the retirees. Especially the pattern of the so-called ‘snowbirds’, which strictly separate their lives between winter and summer and are a highly amenity-oriented group, is an almost unexplored field of research in Europe.

Theoretical presuppositions

Collective identities are constituted by a meaningful sense of belonging to a specific social group with specific characteristics. Even though this sense of belonging might be a construct or a product of one’s imagination, it materializes in symbols and practices which the members of the respective group adopt as their own. If groups start to move, the collective self and other start to mix with each other. This process is described by Arjun Appadurai as the formation of *ethnoscapes*; in it, mobile groups cross the border between territories and

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identities. The *life-world* (Alfred Schütz) as the meaningful frame within enculturation takes place is no longer taken for granted. Current theories about culture proceed on the assumption that the individual integrates into in the new life-world and that a kind of acculturation takes place. But permanently moving groups such as the 'snowbirds' are constructing something like a cultural world in between.

Some results

Acculturation respectively assimilation to, and integration into, the new life-world is not possible because the birds of passage are permanently on the move. The boundaries of the life-worlds are in flux and can be constructed according to group or individual needs. They have no life either *here or there*. The transient borders between self and other constitute a transcultural life-world with new constructions of collective identity – best described as a culture of amenity.

In the workshop I want to present and discuss the results of my research on the identity patterns of the German 'snowbirds'. I will focus on the strategies which they develop to lead their lives between two life-worlds and to have a sense of belonging to various groups and places. These strategies are:

- homelands (Heimaten) – From home to home
- *bifocality* – Germany near and far
- reducing complexity through collectivity – the German *colony*
- *mañana* – a shared stock of knowledge in its own right
- *survival* as a means of justifying one's existence
- self-perception as *guests*
- shirking one's responsibility