

Lifestyle Migrants in Central Portugal: Strategies of Settlement and Socialisation

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Abstract

This paper looks at migration characteristics, settlement patterns and socialisation strategies adopted by lifestyle migrants in two particular sub-regions of Central Portugal: *Pinhal Interior Norte* (Interior Woodlands North) and *Medio Tejo* (Medium Tagus). Through in-depth interviews, participant observation as well as through internet blogs and cyber forum debate analysis, the article looks at the impact these new arrivals have upon the local communities and landscapes; how they perceive their own integration and acceptance and formulate relations with local populations (inter-community connectedness); and thirdly, how they construct and maintain intra-community relation and support patterns, which include social, cultural and information network building (physical and virtual).

1. Introduction

For the last half-a-century, Portugal has been a destination for lifestyle and sun-searching migrants originating from Northern and Central Europe (and above all from Great Britain, Germany, Holland and Sweden) as well as North America (United States and Canada), the grand majority of which have settled in very specific Portuguese coastal regions where sun and leisured lifestyle options are considered abundant, and where the cost of living, in comparison to the countries these lifestyle migrants come from, is lower. These regions have included, above all, the Algarve in southern Portugal and the *Costa do Sol* (Estoril/Cascais) region on the outskirts of Lisbon going west.

In more recent years, however, an increase in lifestyle migration to non-coastal Portuguese regions has equally been witnessed, with many of these migrants searching out isolated/unpopulated areas, inexpensive real-estate opportunities, as well as ecological lifestyle environments to settle down in. Such has been the case with a number of the interior regions of Portugal.

Known for its rural, under-developed life and disparities, since the 1960's, Portuguese interior regions have been unable to secure a sustainable economic upkeep for many of its peoples. In consequence, this has led to the depopulation of these areas, with outward flows having two primary destinations: 1.) to the more prosperous Portuguese regions located along the Portuguese coastal belt (and above all to the two primary cities of Lisbon and Porto); 2.) emigration to other countries (e.g. France, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, United States, Canada, Brazil, among others). Resulting from this outward mobility, evidence of abandonment of the Portuguese interior has been quite noticeable and diversified in nature (Hespanha, 1996,

2004). Perhaps most evident is the aging of the population. While younger generations have departed in search of work and better lives elsewhere, it is the elderly who have stayed behind to occupy the spaces where they have lived all their lives. The Portuguese interior is today marked and characterised by their faces, many of whom equally feel neglected by a highly centralised Portuguese welfare state that ignores these regions. But the abandonment is not unique to the people of the Portuguese interior, as also included are the things that were built by the people. These include homes that now sit abandoned with no one to inhabit them; roads not taken care of, as seldom does anyone travel them; schools left abandoned for there are no children to attend them; churches sitting empty because the local Diocese will no longer provide a priest for the dwindling population; and so on and so forth. The nature world is also not immune to such neglect, with agricultural lands sitting abandoned. Cultivation has instead been replaced with brambles and weeds and bushes. Property-dividing stone walls, once upon a time territorial markers of ownership, are now toppled and debilitated. And the farm animals, once a key fixture of sound and scenery of the landscape, today play a lesser role in these settings. Resultingly, we lay witness to an interactive process – just as the rural exodus brings degradation to the landscape, this abandonment equally triggers apathy towards these regions, now considered insignificant territories possessing little value, where nothing happens and very little exists.

Of course, what many of the native peoples perceive of the Portuguese central interior – as that of geographical areas where opportunities to achieve a better livelihood are non-existent – many from outside these regions see opportunities for a less expensive, more tranquil and laid back lifestyle away from the mad rush of urban living. Looking for exactly that, a growing trend has been the arrival of both permanent and seasonal lifestyle migrants. In consequence of the outward migration of those who originate from the interior regions of Portugal and the subsequent abandonment of lands and properties – sometimes even entire villages – this has led to property price devaluation in the local real-estate markets. This same price devaluation has equally become a primary point of attraction for many newcomers originating from countries considered economically more prosperous than that of Portugal (e.g. Great Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, the United States, etc.). Replacing the outward migration has, on one hand, been that of expat migrants searching out a less-expensive, more tranquil lifestyle a bit further from the beaches, but closer to the countryside; on the other, third-country counter culture dropouts and ecologists who have come looking to escape certain societal norms and in search of a more sustainable lifestyle.

With the incoming of these new arrivals, a key question worthy of scrutiny is: how are these foreign populations changing the landscape, not only physically, but also socio-culturally, and how are they contributing to rejuvenating life in these interior regions? As well, given that certain villages and towns are now witnessing expat clustering, bringing with them new languages, new lifestyles and new mentalities, another central issue is that of insertion, the degree of the ‘warmth of the welcome’ by the native population. With this paper I attempt to draw light to these matters by looking at the migration trends, settlement patterns and socialisation strategies adopted by incoming migrants in Central Portugal, by looking at two particular sub-regions of the Portuguese Central Interior: that of *Pinhal Interior Norte* (Interior Woodlands North) and *Médio Tejo* (Medium Tagus). Through in-depth interviews, participant observation and through internet blogs and cyber forum debate analysis, I look at the why’s behind opting for this part of Portugal; how these migrants perceive their own integration and acceptance, and formulate relations with local populations (inter-community connectedness); and thirdly, how they construct and maintain intra-community relation and support patterns, including social, cultural and information network building.

2. Lifestyle migration – defining the concept

In defining the migration type approached in this study – that of lifestyle migration¹ – we are here not referring to an act of mobility typical of migration flows around the world – often carried out for economic reasons, when of a voluntary nature; or due to armed conflicts, persecution or natural disasters, when of an involuntary nature (Papastergiadis, 2000; Castles and Miller, 2003; Massey *et al.*, 2005). Quite the contrary in fact, as we are here in the midst of a group of individuals that often possess a sufficient amount economic security, enough to allow them to move to a country that, although often not as developed as their country of origin, can provide them with the better quality of life they seek (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009a).

The study of lifestyle migration is the study of individuals that, through mobility, seek an escapist, self-realization project; that leads them to search for the intangible 'good life' abroad (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009a). Of course not all these migrants are driven by the same lifestyle orientations and motivations. Defining 'the good life' is subjective – left to be defined by each person individually. Still, indifferent of the way an individual might go about defining his/her idealised 'good life', the purpose of migrating in search of the dreamed life, in the words of Benson and O'Reilly (2009a: 3), "is about escape, escape *from* somewhere and something, while simultaneously an escape *to* self-fulfillment and a new life – a recreation, restoration or rediscovery of oneself, of personal potential or of one's 'true' desires". Equally, drawing from Torkington (2010: 102), "perhaps the one unifying factor of this group is their belief that a *change of residential place* will lead not simply to better opportunities in life, but rather to something which might be described as a better *lifestyle* and/or a more fulfilling *way of life*" (italics in the original).

Lifestyle migration as a definition, however, does not merely stop at the process of changing one's life in the name of realising the sought-after lifestyle ideal. Also key to the concept is life *in* the migration. Lifestyle migration must equally focus the everyday lives of the migrants in the destination and how resulting life transformations are negotiated. To understand the driving motive behind the migration processes is key; however, to analyse the impact of the mobility on their lives and identities of the migrant also reveals a wider rhetoric of self-realization.

3. Methodological considerations

The lifestyle migration case study presented in this paper is based on preliminary results from on-going research with lifestyle migrants that have taken up permanent or part-time residence in the *Pinhal Interior Norte* (Interior Woodlands North) and *Medio Tejo* sub-regions of Central Portugal.

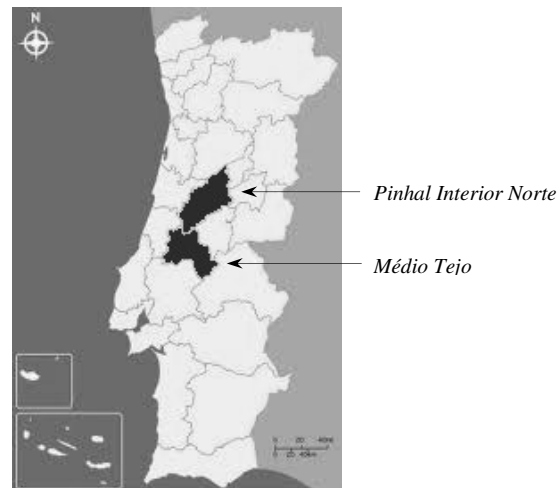
Concerning the geographical area, the study of lifestyle migration to these two sub-regions offers a unique case, not only in the context of location and geography (in the sense that these areas are not typical of the regions that have attracted lifestyle migrants to Portugal in the past, as well as the fact that these regions are deprived of certain attractions and amenities many lifestyle migrants often search out), but also in relation to the characteristics of the lifestyle migrants that have settled in central Portugal.

This considered, in order to framework this study territorially, a brief description of the sub-regions where the study takes place is essential. *Pinhal Interior Norte* and *Medio Tejo* are two of the 28 Nut III statistical sub-regions of Portugal (see Figure 1), both of which belonging to the Nut II Centre Region of Portugal. According to the 2001 population censuses, the two regions

¹ Previous research has attempted to link these mobility forms to wider phenomena using umbrella concepts such as retirement migration, leisure migration, (international) counter-urbanization, second home ownership, amenity-seeking and seasonal migration (Buller and Hoggart, 1994; King *et al.*, 2000; Casado-Díaz, 2006).

had a combined population of 364 613 (*Pinhal Interior Norte* with 138 543, *Médio Tejo* with 226 070, respectively) accounting for 3.5 per cent of Portugal's total population. In the two sub-regions only one city is accounted for, that of Oliveira do Hospital in the *Pinhal Interior Norte* sub-region, as of 2001, possessing a population of 22 112 habitants.

Figure 1: Location of the *Pinhal Interior Norte* and *Médio Tejo* Sub-regions in Portugal



In order to analyse similarities, patterns and differences in the information collected, the process of data triangulation (multi-method data collection) (Arksey and Knight 1999) is undertaken, as a means to deepening and, in some cases, validating our understanding via. Thus, in order to reach conclusions, this study relies on result gathered from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and internet blog, cyber forum debate analysis and through the monitoring of media forms.

Concerning the carrying out of interviews, before entering the field, one primary source was utilised as an intermediary between the researcher and the subjects to be interviewed, that of the socialisation network Portugal Friends. Lead by a husband and wife expat team, Portugal Friends organises social functions in locations throughout Central Portugal and, above all, in communities across the *Pinhal Interior Norte* and *Médio Tejo* sub-regions, namely: Tomar, Torres Novas, Ansião and Lousã.² One primary form of interviewee recruitment has been accomplished via contacts made at the social events organised by this informal network.

As well, interviews are guided by a semi-structured interview schedule containing the principal lines of questioning clearly directed at answering the hypotheses sets out to be investigated. These questions fall under the headings of: 1) reasons for taking up residence in Central Portugal; 2) perceptions on integration and acceptance (inter-community connectedness); 3) intra-community relation and support patterns – the same three points of analysis debated in this paper. Beyond face-to-face conversations, some interviewees have further supplied information, thoughts and reflections via an online questioner, a technique opted for in order to give the interviewees time to reflect on their answers.

Adding to this qualitative method, participant observation is a second research technique utilised. Beyond carrying out this action at the social gatherings organised by Portugal Friends, which in some towns may bring together up to 40 participants, I also draw attention to the monthly car boot sale in the town of Miranda do Corvo which brings together large

² Outside the two sub-regions under observation, Portugal Friends also organises gatherings in the cities of Leiria and Lisbon.

concentrations of expats residing in Central Portugal. This location and event has been a privileged place to gather information, make contacts with future interviewees and observe the individuals under study.

Lastly, screening posts on expat internet blogs, debates on cyber forums created for and maintained by the migrants as well as the monitoring of expat media forms, on one hand, provides secondary views on specific issues, on the other, in the case of specific expat bloggers, provides the research an avenue to follow certain migrant life paths and experiences. A number of key blogs and forums worth highlighting include: www.portugalfriends.com, <http://expatsportugal.com/>, <http://www.gekkoportugal.com>, <http://www.he-he-portugal.com/>. In relation to personal blogs, these include above all: www.emmashouseinportugal.com/, www.ribeiravelha.com/, www.atomicdogma.com/, www.portugalpermaculture.blogspot.com/, and www.permaculturinginportugal.net/. Lastly, concerning media forms, these include the monthly publication Hey! Portugal and the weekly radio show Good Morning Portugal on Vida Nova FM.

3. Central Portugal: How moves here and why?

Previous research on lifestyle migration to Portugal has focused mainly on retirement aged migrants who take upon residency in Portugal's most southerly region of the Algarve (Williams and Patterson, 1998; King, Warnes and Williams, 2000; Williams, King, Warnes and Patterson, 2000). As Torkington (2010) points out in her research on lifestyle migrants in the Algarve, however, many of these migrants coming from Northern Europe are clearly not of retirement age. In an equal fashion, this couldn't be truer in relation to Central Portugal.³ Although no official statistics on expats in Central Portugal exist, let alone the age structures of this population, proof of this populations 'youthness' is evident, not only via the visible presence of working age expats, but also through the growing number of expat children in the public schools.

But who are the lifestyle migrants who take up residence in the Portuguese central interior? In Torkington's (2010) description of lifestyle migrants in the Algarve, the author points out that many don't speak the local language; they often live in the same areas, in the same types of accommodation (apartments, 'townhouses' or villas in *aldeamentos* or 'integrated resorts'); that they look physically similar, behave in a similar fashion and go to places (bars, restaurants, sports and fitness clubs) where they meet up with their compatriots". Surely the lack of command of the Portuguese language is very applicable to the lifestyle migrants of Central Portugal; however, this is where the comparisons stop. The defining contrasts of the lifestyle migrants of Central Portugal are more varied. Their territorial dispersion, in fact, does not favour the clustering described by Torkington, as many opt for countryside solitude. This dispersion, as well as the fact that the presence of these individuals in central Portugal is numerically much lower than in the Algarve, also implies that amenities specific to this population are uncommon, thus routine meeting points (bars, restaurants, clubs, etc.) are pretty much non-existent.

In attempting to personify the lifestyle migrants in Central Portugal, however, two distinct characterisations can be made (mind you there are crossover points as well). On one hand, there are those individuals who come searching for a quiet, leisured and inexpensive lifestyle, but who equally give importance to amenities and culture. These are older migrants who at the tail-end of their careers, opt out for a tranquil lifestyle in a warmer climate; as they are also younger individuals or families unhappy with specific situations in their countries of origin, and, as a result, opt for a 'new start' in a new part of the world that is felt can provide them with a reliable

³ A 2009 survey of more than 850 northern Europeans living in Portugal, conducted by *The Portugal News* weekly English language newspaper, found that 68.25% of respondents were between 36 and 65 years of age, with less than 25 per cent being over 65.

foundation on which they can build personally meaningful lives (O'Reilly, 2000; Sunil *et al.*, 2007; Hoey, 2009). Yet, on the other hand, there are those best described as counter-culture dropouts who move to central Portugal to escape the hustle and bustle of big city living and industrialisation (Benson, 2009), as well as ecologists who have come looking to escape certain societal norms and in search of a more sustainable lifestyle. In fact, Central Portugal has become a sought-after location for expat permaculturists who see in these areas ideal locations to carry out their chosen lifestyles. In both circumstances the search for the good life as a comparative project is a consistent theme (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009a; 2009b); with the often ultimate aim being the providing of meaning to life in an environment that possesses the components that will permit doing so, be them rural idyllists looking to an environment fit for a sustainable lifestyle, or bourgeois bohemianism search to find themselves in the confines of rural Portugal, or counter-urbanists trading in the big city lifestyle for a less hurried lifestyle, peace and quiet and space in the country (van Dam *et al.*, 2002).

That said, given the motives and desires of these migrants to relocate, a pertinent question worth asking is: how did the decision to move to Central Portugal come about? The following accounts, the first provided by the contributor of the blog www.emmashouseinportugal.com, and the latter taken from two interviews, provide a series of common and diverse answers to this question:

“Passing through the (Portuguese) countryside in the train or bus, I'd see hundreds of gorgeous old houses and stone buildings in ruins. And everywhere: for sale signs. [...] The idea of living here for a while was really appealing. [...] Very affordable, I thought. Not as cheap as Bulgaria, *the* property hotspot in 2007, but it had far better re-sale potential. [...] A price-based search from €10k – €50k resulted in properties from the Lisbon area to the far north, with particular concentrations of properties around Castelo Branco (centre-east) and the Minho. In general terms, the Algarve and the coast are more expensive than the north and the interior. [...] There was nothing in this price range in the Algarve or lower Alentejo, the most southern regions. [...] But I was after properties in bulk and I didn't have a particular area in mind. I wanted to see everything. [...] But when I arrived in the Minho I recognised what I was looking for: Stone. [...] The potential of these places was obvious; these stone ruins already had so much character and charm. Sometime in this early stage, I saw the house I would eventually buy and it was not in the Minho but in the Beiras (centre), south of Coimbra. It would remain my favourite for the rest of the search” (*italics in the original*) (<http://www.emmashouseinportugal.com>, posted 03.02.09, Australian).

“We lived in the Algarve for five years and realized it wasn't 'real' Portugal. When we arrived in Portugal in 2001 life was similar (in the Algarve) to what it's like here now. But the Algarve keeps growing and there's been all kinds of construction going on there. Also crime started to grow there and that, of course, is a problem. In fact it was when we installed security cameras in our house that we knew this was not the way we wanted to live. So from there we started looking elsewhere here in Portugal. That's how we ended up here, where life is quiet and where people are gentle and friendly” (Interview 4, English).

“We drove around the country and explored everything. We got to know it very well but we fell in love with this area. It's all in the authenticity here. Real, simple people; real authentic culture, traditions, festivities and landscape – that's what I love here and that's why I'm here. You don't get this in the cities; you can't find it in the Algarve. Why would I move to the Algarve, so I can run into English people every day? Isn't that the reason why we want out of England? I didn't move to Portugal because of the fancy parties and the golf. I moved here to be free, way from the mad rush; to learn and to take in the local life; to eat, to drink, to learn how to make wine, olive oil and other goods ... things like that. Here in this part of the country you can do all that and you can do it the

real way; the way it's been done for ages, where consumerism isn't as evident and where you can still live cheaply. You can buy land with ruins on it very cheaply as there's so much available. Have a look around and you'll see. Everything's for sale" (Interview 12, English).

The above citations tell us a series of things: first, for these individuals, and as is the case with many expats have taken up residency in this part of Portugal, Central Portugal was come across in an unexpected fashion, either during a travel period throughout Portugal or after taking up residency elsewhere, having discover the region after a first move abroad. We also witness two primary reasons for opting to take up residency in Central Portugal: 1) that of lower property and living costs compared to other Portuguese regions, and 2) that of a more genuine, simplistic and safe Portuguese way of life. Concerning the first point, being acquainted with southern European ways of living and with the characteristics offered up by southern European countries and regions, the object of 'moving south' is a combination of 'escaping the north' and all that is associated with it (cold climate, expensive lifestyle, urbanisation, undesired jobs, etc.) and 'finding refuge in the south'. Keeping this primary objective in mind, the process of 'shopping' for a location, beyond the importance of finding a place where one can accomplish the escape, is also that of affordability. Central Portugal may, therefore, be seen as a substitute for other southern European locations that may be out of the price range of those whose ultimate goal was a move south, and thus they find in these regions the location that best fits their budget.

Furthermore, many, after a well contemplated and studied search, also 'handpick' Central Portugal because of what it is – remote, secluded and away from the beating track of tourists and away from urbanisation. In defence of this argument, and as was pointed out in the third quote presented above, moving to Portugal's well renown lifestyle migration destination – that of the Algarve – is not completely moving away from one's native land, but simply replacing it with another geographical location where there's more sun and recreation, but yet still a heavy concentration of Northern Europeans. Some, therefore, explain avoiding the Algarve for this very reason – to steer clear of heavy concentrations of expats and tourists (Sunil *et al.*, 2007). As it's been pointed out by O'Reilly (2003; 2007), in terms of sought after lifestyle and chosen destination, the boundaries of what is lifestyle migration and what is tourism are often blurred. The lifestyle migrants of Central Portugal wish to make these boundaries quite evident.⁴

As well, for younger migrant lifestyle families, highlighted as a point of attraction in the taking up of residence in Central Portugal, is also that of the safe environment many claim this part of the country offers their family and, above all, for their children. Comments focusing on the deterioration of societal values in the counties of origin combined with Central Portugal providing quite the opposite – a non-violent environment where family values are still considered important to the people. Thus, beyond the 'back to nature' philosophy many possess, 'back to values' is equally important, something it is felt the rural settings of Central Portugal and its people can offer.

It, therefore, becomes a matter of choice, as for those who settle in these Portuguese interior regions are not looking to coastal 'fun in the sun' as much as they are attracted to an antiquated, traditional lifestyle where there's greater security in a non-urbanised environment; this along with the fact that what is desired is the getting up-close with the local culture, landscape and people (Geoffrey, 2007; Benson, 2009; Benson and O'Reilly, 2009b). In the words of Hoey (2009: 34): "Lifestyle migrants recognize the essential role of place in creating a lasting sense of self. They self-consciously engage in this process, choosing particular places as personal therapeutic landscapes". For those who have settled in Central Portugal, attraction to the

⁴ Torkington (2009) equally points out that British lifestyle migrants in the Algarve have the somewhat ambivalent status of being considered as much tourist as resident, even if Portugal is their principal (or indeed only) home. Still, the author advances that the more permanent settlers tend to reject the 'tourist' identity label.

landscape and culture, and sense of well-being within this scenario, is undoubtedly a major drawing point, one that outweighs any sort of proximity to the greater population masses or large concentrations of fellow nationals. The 'personal therapeutic landscapes', for these migrants, are, therefore, their own unique findings in Central Portugal, that completes their search for a sought-after utopian ideal.

4. Inter-community connectedness: integration and acceptance

Now in taking up residency in Central Portugal, these lifestyle migrants are fully conscious of the fact that this part of the country is not one used to the incoming of foreign populations. Furthermore, they are also aware of the regions' disparities and abandonment, factors which, for many, is a point of attraction. So once settled in these regions, how these lifestyle migrants integrate themselves into the mainstream of the Portuguese central interior's socio-cultural and physical landscape is one worth scrutinising.

For these individuals, mobility is presented as a way of overcoming dissatisfaction, be it with work, society, climate, lifestyle, etc. As elucidated by Benson and O'Reilly (2009b: 610), for the lifestyle migrant, the act of taking up a new life elsewhere is "the act of taking control of their lives, or as releasing them from ties and enabling them to live lives more 'true' to themselves". This leads to life, in the post-migration, often being reported as the direct opposite of life before migration. The Benson and O'Reilly (2009b: 610) further explain, comparisons between life before and after migration "may not reflect objective reality; the presented advantages of life in the destination are often romanticised accounts". In relation to the lifestyle migrants in Central Portugal, although many articulated being happy with their 'new' lives and their projects, not all aspects of settlement and insertion was rendered in a positive light.

First, as articulated in the previous section, lifestyle migrants opt for Central Portugal as this part of the country provides them with the opportunity to fulfil certain dreamed life projects in an idyllic place. In conjunction with the conquering of their own goals, however, many also feel that they are playing a part in giving back to the land, villages, towns and regions. What has been abandoned, and often even considered useless by the local population, these migrants consider of great value. Thus, they invest in large tracts of land and restart to cultivate them; they buy old stone homes that sit in ruin and rebuilt them, and in settling in these new rural communities, they contribute to adding numbers to a dwindling population. Furthermore, these individuals not only become consumers, they also contribute to local economies via the setting up of businesses and through the promotion of the region. Many active-aged lifestyle migrants become 'self-employed expatriates' in their new surroundings (Stone and Stubbs, 2007). As other studies have pointed out (Befus *et al.*, 1988; Madden, 1999; Stone and Stubbs, 2007; Benson and O'Reilly, 2009b) it is common for lifestyle migrants to use their business ventures as a means to an end; using them to finance their new lifestyles. In the case of the lifestyle migrants in Central Portugal, while enterprise choices vary, many establish businesses aimed at providing services for other migrants or tourists, such as establishing ethnic food production businesses, real estate ventures, media forms (e.g. newspapers), guest accommodations (e.g. bed and breakfast), online businesses, among others; and yet others invest in traditional endeavors, namely in arts and crafts, agriculture, traditional home restoration, etc.⁵

Aside from those who venture out with their own businesses, another sub-group worth mentioning is that of ecologists/permaculturists. In the case of these individuals, although life principals are more often than not based on self-sustainability principals, some partake in the local economies, mainly, through local market sales of home grown agricultural products and

⁵ Entrepreneurial activities undertaken by these migrants are often a departure from their careers in life before migration. In fact, it is often the case that many lifestyle migrants have little to no previous experience in establishing and running businesses, thus often the opportunity of migrating is equally the opportunity to follow their professional dreams (Hoey, 2005; Benson and O'Reilly, 2009b).

other food products (e.g. canned food goods, jams, etc.), homemade clothing, arts and crafts, eco-home construction (e.g. yurts) and spiritual and health practices (e.g. yoga and meditation classes, etc.). These activities, however, are not only exclusive to this sub-group.

The conquering of these objectives brings feelings of ‘mission accomplished’ to these migrants. However, as expressed by many, seldom is the accomplishment of these goals ‘an easy road to travel’. Asked of the interviewees to reflect upon their integration into Portuguese society and their relations with members of the host society, I here refer to one answer which best sums up the opinions of many:

“We feel welcomed by the people, but not the bureaucracy” (Interview 4, English).

A general sentiment expressed is that the Portuguese in Central Portugal have welcomed them with open arms. The interviewees spoke of the generosity and friendliness on the part of their neighbours and local community, for example:

“Our neighbors often share their vegetables and fruits that they grow. They welcome us and invite us to go with them to meetings and festivals. The people are always so welcoming of us; they want you to be a part of the community” (Interview 17, American).

“We were building our house and living in it without any water and heating, but our closest neighbours were great. They said we could use their water, they provided us with firewood ... That’s the community spirit you have here” (Interview 2, Irish).

“They (the Portuguese) are very family based and have good support networks around them. The family we rent our house from invites us to help pick the grapes and olives and pine cones, and we join them for celebration lunches. We were asked to join the family for New Year celebrations, which we were very happy to do. They are helping us integrate into Portuguese society, which is really good.” (Interview 16, English).

Equally, the welcoming reception felt on the part of the expats has lead many to become more community-minded, with many expressing partaking in community activities, ranging from supporting the local firefighters to the local folklore group (*ranch folclorico*) to becoming volunteers in the organisation of community festivals, among others.

On the flipside of this micro-level sense of welcomeness, many also expressed the frequent impossibility of becoming entirely integrated in the host society when bureaucratic obstacles get in the ways of doing so (mind you they are also aware that these obstacles are not unique to them, as they are common to society-at-large). Talked about are the bureaucracies which include: government restrictions on private businesses; overbearing regulations on car import; paperwork and confusion involved the hook-up of electric power, water supply, telephone land line systems and internet; and the slowness of service in various sectors (banks, health centres, etc.). As well, many refer to existing corruption and loopholes often needed to be traverse in order to resolve issues, the lack of customer service, the ‘cutting of corners’, the ‘it’s who you know factor’ in getting things done, etc.

Still, in opting to stay in Portugal, the lifestyle migrants weight-out the pros and cons, and in the end the result can perhaps be best summed up via the fact that if they keep on building their lives in the immigration country, showing no intention of returning to their origins (as was stated in many of the interviews), this equally implies that the positives of being in Central Portugal outweigh the negatives. In the words of one respondent:

“I don’t mind putting up with the occasional snobby shopkeeper, or a day or two without water in the Summer if, in return, I get peace of mind, tranquility, sunshine, great wine and an all around better quality of life” (Interview 33, English).

5. Intra-community connectedness: network building and support patterns

As we have previously seen, the lifestyle migrants of Central Portugal have opted for this part of the country for a variety of reasons, one of which is the opportunity to not have routine contact with other expats and tourists. This, however, does not imply that most will ‘turn the other cheek’ if they see another Dutch, English or American walk in his/her direction; quit the contrary in fact. Now if constructing bridging capital with members of the host society is easily built – given that such capital is readily offered up by members of the host society (as was seen in the previous section) – the question of bonding capital creation is auto determinant – depending on one’s need for back-home contact in the new environment (Casado-Díaz, 2009).⁶

I point out that one of the primary interviewee sources for this work has been the social network group Portugal Friends. In analysing the ‘meso-level’ of social and cultural networks (including clubs, associations), information networks, support services and intermediaries, when it comes to formal, physical networks, Portugal Friends is the only one of its kind known to the informants spoken to.⁷

Concerning the Portugal Friends social group, taking from the introductory paragraphs on the social group’s website:

“In a foreign country where the local language is not native to you, the difficulty in social interaction becomes even more obvious, and finding new friends or a social circle can present a challenge. Portugal Friends was developed from a need for people, mostly foreigners or Portuguese people who speak English or have lived in other countries, to share their common ideas and interests and enjoy good company” (<http://www.portugalfriends.com/>).

Portugal Friends thus provides a social element, to the lives of expats living in Central Portugal, through regular weekly gatherings and events such as: breakfast mornings, group walks, fund raising events, seasonal dinners, etc. The social network provides the opportunity to meet with others who share a similar cultural background, perhaps the same language (mostly English) as well as interests, offering a space of socialisation for lifestyle migrants who may perhaps be feeling isolated.⁸ In fact, asked to comment on their interactions with other expats outside organised network groups such as Portugal Friends, the interviewees referred to physical distance as a factor that often reduces interaction. Drawing on the words of one interviewee:

“Not everyone has found their dream place to live in a village where there are other expats live there as well. So, for some people, it’s either you learn Portuguese or you have nobody to communicate with on a regular basis outside of your spouse, your children or our family back home. [...] A lot of people here either knew someone living here from ‘back home’ before moving here or discovered others living here when they were looking around. Often people have studied the area before moving and end up knowing other expats in the area” (Interview 25, Dutch).

The gravitation towards other expats, who reside in the same town or village, is in fact described by many as a natural process, this due one primary shared commonality – that of being a

⁶ Following Putnam (2000), bonding capital – the formation of strong ties among individuals within a group – and bridging capital – the formation of cross-cutting ties between people from different groups – are two kinds of social capital.

⁷ Beyond physical social networks, virtual information communities can be found online, in the form of expat community sites and forums, as is the case with: www.expatsportugal.com/, www.he-he-portugal.com/ and <http://www.gekkoportugal.com/>.

⁸ Beyond the socialising element, Portugal Friends often also provides an opportunity for participants to publicise their entrepreneurial and artistic endeavours, as many see in these gathering the opportunity to distribute business cards, etc.

lifestyle migrant and all that it entails. Even when there are distances involved, the majority claim to possessing closer ties with other expats, as with the Portuguese – as ‘welcoming’ and ‘friendly’ as many expats define them to be – there are also certain barriers pointed out, as is the case with language, lifestyle, etc.).⁹

Now in the migration settings, leisure and social-related event and/or happenings created by lifestyle migrants equally provide opportunities for comradeship among the migrants (O’Reilly, 2000; Casado-Díaz, 2009). In the case of Central Portugal, one example sticks out: that of the monthly-held car boot sale in the town of Miranda do Corvo. Organised by The Cedar Centre, a local animal shelter operated by an English expat family, many of the vendors that participate in the car boot sale are lifestyle migrants. The Miranda do Corvo Car Boot, in fact, has become a monthly meeting point for the expat communities of Central Portugal, bring together vendors, artisans, growers, potential buyers as well as supporters of the cause. The monthly gathering not only provides an ideal setting for individuals to sell their home-grown and homemade products, as well as used goods; it is also an event that draws the communities together.

Through their participation in voluntary organizations such as Portugal Friends, and through their attendance of particular events, therefore, lifestyle migrants build up new social relations with others in the same position. Accumulating social capital by embedding themselves in the ‘local’ (expat) social structure, they are contributing to the reduction of isolation as well as reducing distance with the homeland via the degree of connection with other lifestyle migrants.

6. Conclusion

This article has looked at lifestyle mobility to two Portuguese regions located in Central Portugal (*Pinhal Interior Norte* and *Medio Tejo*) not historically known for attracting these types of migrants. That said, with this paper, the goal was to ask why the lifestyle migrants have taken up residency in Central Portugal. This was followed by observations concerning perceptions of integration and acceptance on the part of the Portuguese, and thirdly, analyse strategies of network building and support patterns among the lifestyle migrants.

As Benson and O’Reilly (2009a) point out, the representations of the destinations chosen by such migrants can be categorised under three main headings: the rural idyll, the coastal retreat and the cultural/spiritual attraction. The lifestyle migrant that opts for Central Portugal as the preferred geographical location to achieve their dreams of a better lifestyle fit perfectly into the first and third option, giving lesser importance to the second. We are here in the midst of a group of individuals who values rural comfort living in an environment where solitude and tradition are particularly valued. For these migrants, ‘the rural’ offers them the possibility of belonging, but also of self-transformation and personal renewal, not to mention the possibility of being close an authentic side of Portugal via its historic rural past and traditional past. Thus, for many of these migrants, by presenting themselves as adhering to the moral principles of rural, traditional living, principally through community involvement and social integration, they distinguish themselves from other lifestyle migrants in other settings in Portugal (namely the Algarve) where beach-going and sun-worshipping are the primary variables pursued.

Furthermore, migration to rural spaces may bring about the revitalised and dreamed self, however, for the area being inhabited it may also bring about the possibility of reviving traditional practices, culture, gastronomic traditions, among other, often leading to the (re)designing of activities often better fitted for securing the socio-economic revitalization of these rural areas. This may include a return to traditional arts and crafts, the conservation of nature and local economies (agricultural-based and other-wise), the recuperation of historical

⁹ Worthy of mention, although not given specific attention to in this article, as the expat ‘counterculture or hippie communities’ found in certain areas of Central Portugal. Given the communal state of inhabitation and lifestyle practiced by these individuals, contact is above all with the in-group.

heritance, as well as the dissemination and practice of traditional activities such as festivities, folklore, gastronomy, among others. This can very well be said of Portugal's central interior where the incoming of foreigners interested in the regional offerings may contribute to the regeneration of these recently neglected rural areas.

The better lifestyle-seeking migrants show their interest in wanting to contribute to the regional socio-cultural preservation, often contributing to it via their entrepreneurial endeavors as well as hobby activities, for example. Dealing with the local culture and its people becomes an obvious part of the everyday lives of these expats in the new destination. Lifestyles following migration involve the (re)negotiation of the work-life balance and lifestyle alterations according to local habits. It is also through these strategies of reorientation that the migrants seek the greater good in life; lifestyle migration is thus a search, a project, which continues after the initial act of migration. Of course the support system one may require in that search is equally important, a system that may be pre-defined before migration and found to be different in the post-migration. The inter- and intra-community connectedness (or lack thereof) is very much key to this support system as the lifestyle migrant will equally measure the extent to which his/her lifestyle is truly the one most sought-after according to the availability and personal desire to integrate and relate to others – the Portuguese and other lifestyle migrants.

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