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Place Making and Belonging in the Retirement Destination of Torrox Costa

Introduction

Retiring abroad is commonly addressed as a manifestation of an age-related mobility to fulfil the quest for the 'good life', yet the phenomenon of retirement migration is not only a question of lifestyle, but even has got a spatial dimension. Current research about the motivation for moving to Spanish coastal areas revealed aspects like mild winter climates or the diversity of landscape as most important attraction factors. Meaningful places, affected to local surroundings, facilitate the decision for spending several months a year in Spain and highly contribute to satisfaction with daily life.

The (non)existence of meaningful places, its actively production and even its quality due to issues of belonging is discussed within this paper. After introducing "place" and "non-place" as appropriate theoretical concepts to describe the relevance of place-related factors, the nexus of place and a sense of belonging is highlighted. Leaving their familiar surroundings in Northern European countries for three to twelve months a year and facing insecurities due to their age, retirement migrants are striving for places to belong at the residence. Providing community and encouraging mutuality and solidarity, a sense of belonging contributes to satisfaction within the migrants' lives in Spain.

A further section of this paper is dealing with the methodological approach and the area of investigation, namely the retirement destination of Torrox Costa as a prototype for the structure of most Spanish coastal areas on the Mediterranean. Finally, empirical data reveal the importance of both, meaningful places and a sense of belonging in the retirees' daily lives.

Theoretical concepts: Non-Place, Place Work and Belonging

I would like to introduce some general theoretical concepts addressing notions of place, non-place and belonging, indicating the relevance in a system of leisure-orientated mobility, retirement migrants are part of. Being aware of the ambiguity of the term place, I will use this term in this context to imply both, spatial and social significances. MCWATTERS asserts that "the emphasis rests on the spatial qualities of the various relationships between inhabitants, their environment and each other" (MCWATTERS 2009: 44). But what if there are

no relationships, what if “non-places” are occurring? Revealing the relevance of “non-places” in the case of retirement migrants in Torrox, I have to point out the preferred destinations of retirement migration, namely Spanish coastal areas. Residing in urbanisations, retirement migrants’ lives are continually affected by tourism and the tourist system due to services, set up for tourists like restaurants, public transport services (O’REILLY 2003: 305). Highlighting the intersectionality of tourism and migration due to the site of living, HUETE (2009) remarks that residential tourist and lifestyle migrants are part of the same system of mobility.

Referring to the French anthropologist AUGÉ (2008), I would like to discuss both, the built environment of urbanisations and the social interactions occurring within them as so called “non-places”. He asserts that “the space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude and similitude.” (AUGÉ 2008: 83). Uniformity and standardisation of places create placelessness. TUAN (1977) is of the opinion, that the built environment like houses and streets do not create a sense of place, unless they are distinctive or “become vividly real through dramatization the needs of personal or individual groups” (TUAN 1977: 178). Implying the social notion of place, AUGÉ remarks the possibility of transforming non places into meaningful places. “When individuals come together, they engender the social and organise places” (AUGÉ 2008: 89).

How are human beings supposed to create places within their daily lives? HOCHSCHILD (2010: 623) introduces the term “place work” to put forward a concept, explaining a struggle for defending once home territories. Regarding private clubs and club houses, he indicates, how people inscribe meanings into places via social interactions. Redefining meanings of a place may occur for psychological, social religious or economic reasons and the co-existence of multiple meanings due to different groups may cause a struggle for meanings. Presenting a group value concerning the economic structure, issues of knowledge or even a lifestyle are as important as place work strategies like respecting rules and ideals. Another strategy of place work seems to be formal and informal spatial control by symbolic devices or the language. Finally, HOCHSCHILD reveals out-group intimidation as a strategy of place work, whilst ‘the other’ is to be actively excluded or derogated.

The struggle for meanings is highly interlinked to questions of inclusion and exclusion as well as access and participation. According to ANTHIAS (2009), belonging is “about the social places constructed by such identifications and memberships” (ANTHIAS 2009: 233). Whilst identity combines individual and collective narratives, presentation and labelling, as well as myths of origin, belonging is more about the experiences of being part of a social fabric. Belonging means to be accepted as part of a community. “To belong is to share values, networks and practices, and not just a question of identification” (ANTHIAS 2009: 233). In the context of retirement migrants in Spain, affirming chosen lifestyles and creating a sense of belonging to new spatial surroundings and social fabrics are simultaneously occurring within daily lives.

Questions of belonging emerge, “because we feel that there are ranges of space, places, locales and identities [...] we cannot belong to” (ANTHIAS 2009: 232). Fulfilling the need for belongingness is the primary function of one’s identity and remains an essential basis for it. MILLIGAN (2003) points to the emotional aspect of a sense of belonging to a place and defines

place attachment as an “emotional link to a physical site given meaning through social interaction” (MILLIGAN 2003: 383). Research on elderly residents of an Appalachian community by ROWLES (1983) proposes three senses of “insideness” due to attachment of the residents’ surroundings. Being aware of physical details of a place is meant by the term “physical insideness”, whereas “social insideness” describes the “integration within the social fabric” (ROWLES 1983: 302) of a community. Ascribing insideness a temporal dimension, a sense of rootedness to a place throughout the life-course is meant by autobiographical insideness.

PFAFF-CZARNECKA (2009) suggests the term attachment, both material and immaterial, for the spatial dimension of belonging. Furthermore, perception and performance of commonality and a sense of mutuality are constitutional factors of a sense of belonging. Whilst the latter becomes obvious by norms of reciprocity, loyalty, and commitment, commonality refers to the sharing of common cultural forms like lifestyles, values or experiences. In postmodern times, multiple belongings are occurring within individuals’ lives, so that people can either simultaneously belong to two or more countries or they can change their belongings consecutively among the life-course. Introducing a spatial dimension, horizons, like the nation-state or ethnic groups indicate places to belong. In my opinion, a lifestyle community, like the German retirement community in Torrox, could be treated as a horizon as well as a membership to an association, like a choir or a hitchhiking group, on a smaller scale. Belonging to groups and associations and sharing common lifestyles are the most important means to fulfil the quest for a good life. Whilst debates about integration mainly focus on essential adaptations, host societies demand to implement, the concept of belonging is highlighting the diversity of migrants’ personality and explains, how and where retirement migrants are socially embedded.

Methodology

The following section deals with the methodology I used during three fieldwork trips to the retirement destination of Torrox Costa from 2009 to 2011. Apart from the long existence as a preferred destination for German residents, a variety of urbanisations like apartment blocks, semi-detached or detached houses and fincas qualifies the location for an in-depth study of the daily lives. Another argument for Torrox is the variety of the residents’ economic structure as well as the coexistence of all types of retirement migrants, like full residents, returning residents, seasonal visitors and peripatetic visitors (O’REILLY 2000).

A mixture of both, traditional quantitative methods like a standardised questionnaire and qualitative methods like expert interviews and interviews on the basis of photography (reflexive photography) were used to gain empirical data. The standardised questionnaire was carried out among 150 German retirees, living in Torrox for more than 3 months last year, whereas current results existing for 55 respondents. Following the design of a nationwide survey carried out by the MIREs-project in main parts, the questionnaire was seeking for motives for staying in Torrox as well as daily activities and frequented places at the first time, the respondents came to Spain and at present. Furthermore, the questionnaire

collected data about demographic indicators of the German retirement community. Expert interviews were carried out among chairmen of associations, German priests as well as shop owners and responsible persons of the municipality to get an insight into daily activities that may provide a sense of belonging as well as to get familiar with difficulties and exclusions, retirees are faced to.

Within reflexive photography, interviewees were asked to take photos due to suggested issues, like motives for living on the Costa del Sol or frequented places in former times and at present. After developing, the photos were used within an in-depth interview, creating stimuli for narratives on the one hand and finding out more emotional and directly aspects of the respondents' daily lives on the other hand. Influencing daily lives, a well-balanced structure in terms of the demographic issues, the length and duration of stay and even the housing was taken into consideration due to the choice of participants.

Results

According to the population register (*empadronamiento*), 2700 Germans are currently living in the municipality of Torrox, mainly in the district of Torrox Costa. My investigation reveals that only 8% are permanently living in Torrox, whilst the majority of the respondents are considered to live in Spain for 3 to 5 months (43%). Due to the demographic structure, the average age is about 71, whereas 25% are over 75 years. Addressing the demographic structure in the light of the history of Torrox as a retirement destination since 1976, one fourth came to the municipality before 1995. The so called "younger olds", having moved to Torrox during that time, have become older and the municipality is faced the phenomenon of overageing regarding the inner demographic structure of German retirees.

Several narratives about the time, retirees made the decision for moving to Spain are similar to the following quotation, which asserts that the destination Torrox was chosen by pure chance.

"I read an announcement in the Weserkurier by pure chance. They offered a single room apartment for vacation. We didn't know very much about the Costa del Sol region. Indeed, we spent several holiday on the Balearic Islands or the Costa Brava region. [...] Well, they offered a free flight, and presented three types of apartments and finally decided to buy." – Karin T., Torrox Costa

Quantitative data provide motives for moving to Torrox, like mild winter climate conditions or coexisting reasons like the sea and mountain regions. In fact, these results still remain abstract and arbitrarily and respondents were asked to state about what places they visit frequently. At the beginning of their stay in Torrox, respondents mainly indicate names of towns (60,9%) like Granada, Sevilla, Málaga or even other tourist destinations (9,4%), whilst concrete and real places in Torrox remain relatively slight (12,3%). Revealing the insignificance of concrete places, these results encourage the view upon this destination as a non-place. Apart from the fact that Torrox is seemed to be a transit space due to the circulation of retirement migrants, there is a lack of unique features or concrete symbolic points of interests. At present, however, real places, like the promenade, the church, the

market or specific restaurants become more important (34,4%). As the following quotation remarks, narratives are inscribed into such places to transform them into meaningful places.

“This couple took us to Buenavista for playing bingo. Since November 1998, I belong to this community, playing bingo every Monday and Thursday evening. Over the years, I’ve almost become responsible for. Yet, together with others, because you can hardly manage this on your own. That’s a point, we discovered a community and nice people.” – Ingrid A., Torrox Costa

As AUGÉ (2008) points out, social interactions contribute to this kind of transformation. Furthermore, this narrative reveals a kind of place work by re-defining meanings of places due to individual needs. The restaurant Buenavista is spatially controlled by members of the German bingo club on Mondays and Thursdays, whilst the language provides an out-group intimidation of those, who are not able to understand German language.

Providing a kind of inclusion as well as a sense of belonging, meaningful places even contribute to several forms of insideness. Physical insideness is embodied within the awareness of physical details of one’s personal surroundings. Describing her route for daily shopping, a 85 year-old respondent, using a walking frame, is knowing exactly all those routes, she is able to pass with her walking frame.

“I usually walk up to the ALDI supermarket. I always walk into the Schlosserstraße passing the nice park. Well, today I went back via the beach. Because the promenade has been renovated quite nice, now you are able to walk there. My road down here is quite bad. I am not annoyed about holes in the road. I know exactly those routes, I am able to pass with my walking frame.” – Jutta V., Torrox Costa

Becoming obvious in case of illness of a group member, social insideness appears in the community, whereas biographic insideness reveals in narratives of those residents, who have come to Torrox for 30 years or more. Talking about activities like hitchhiking in former times or spending time with their grandchildren, creates a kind of rootedness and reveal both, physiological and psychological changes due to the life-course.

Addressing belonging as being part of the social fabric, narratives like *“When she once misses the choir, I’ll phone her to ask what has happened”* or *“We all cared about him, when his wife died last summer by taking him to the choir”* or as well *“I can rely on that family whenever I want. They take me to the airport, as well as to the doctors”* are highlighting mutuality. Providing commonality, the motives for living in Spain could be seen as common values or even a lifestyle, German retirees seek to fulfil. Consuming amenities, provided in the Costa del Sol region, contributes to the structure of their daily lives in a vast range and indicates that they reproduce their lifestyle within their daily activities. Whilst PFAFF-CZARNECKA (2009) is referring to the nation-state or ethnic groups, I am of the opinion that the term horizon is supposed to be used for the German retirement community in Torrox as an age-related lifestyle community as well. Yet, there are differences of how they practice their daily lives and, on a smaller scale, belonging could be asserted by taking a look on more concrete horizons of belonging. Fulfilling individual interests by joining an association creates a sense of belonging. Apart from participating reunions regularly, members of associations are also

creating a social fabric by caring about current difficulties within the members' daily lives. A sense of mutuality becomes obvious in quotations like:

"One member broke his leg last week. I took him to the hospital, because otherwise he would have been alone. [...] Commonly, in Spain, relatives care about sick persons in their families. We are still like relatives." – Annemarie, Torrox Park

Finally, I would like to reveal the notion of belonging in terms of place attachment. When retirees decide to go back to Germany because their physiological circumstances are rapidly worsening, they became aware of how they got familiar with their surroundings. Looking back to the time in Torrox, Frieda S. asserts:

"I had a wonderful time here in Torrox. I remember my friends from the Café Caribe, we stuck together both in good and bad times. In Germany, all my friends have still died." – Frieda S., Torrox Costa

Jutta V. fears immobility in their home town in Germany due to those routes, she is able to pass with her walking frame as well as disorientation in terms of daily supply.

"Comparing to my home town, I am more independent in Torrox." – Jutta V., Torrox Costa

Conclusion

In the light of theoretical conceptualization, I could highlight the relevance of both, place-related issues and horizons of belonging due to the daily lives of German retirees living on the Costa del Sol. Furthermore, I could indicate a nexus between place and belonging regarding social and spatial considerations. Empirical data reveal the importance of negotiating meanings in primordial anonymous non-places by inscribing narratives about relevant activities in the daily lives. Finally, place work strategies, like creating a group value or forms of spatial control became evident.

Due to my methodological approach, the vital interaction of quantitative and qualitative methods revealed strong and weak spots and, furthermore, provided a holistic view upon the daily lives of German retirement migrants in the municipality of Torrox.

The continuous trend of overageing within the German retirement community and the fact that more and more retirees decide to go back to Germany in old age reveal that the municipality is affected by transformations. Challenging demographic changes by encouraging the creation of meaningful places and providing multiple horizons of belonging to make retirees comfortable with their new surroundings would be an appropriate concept to keep the destination attractive for new generations of retirement migrants.

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