Retired to life in Spain: conditions, situations, scenarios

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Introduction

Migratory movements exist all over the world, are sizeable in many countries, and differ in terms of the people who are affected by their demographic features, geographical distribution, their causes and consequences. In essence, the different types of migratory movements have mushroomed in recent years. Worldwide globalization has facilitated the transfer of tangible and intangible assets, increasing conditions of inequality in many geographical areas that have fostered the generalization of human mobility (GCIM, 2005). The proliferation of regional and local conflicts, the disappearance of political regimes, new reasons for migrating, the global dissemination of information, etc., are some of the factors that have boosted new migratory movements in recent years (King, 2002), that has gone hand in hand with an upturn in the activities of different national and international agencies and analysis centres and groups at universities and research establishments, interested in their analysis, management and in policy planning.

However, there is a danger inherent to the abundance of migratory types: analytical instruments, measures and concepts are required in order to understand and compare them
at different geographical levels. The general definition of “international migrant” as ‘any person who changes his or her country of usual residence…in which the person lives, ..as a usual resident’ and moves ‘..to a country ..for a period of at least a year (12 months)’ (United Nations, 1998) permits many variations that are applied differently in many countries. Of the 22 most general types of international migrants (Parker, 2005), only a few are consistent in most of the countries that produce international migration data\(^1\), because each country tends to use its own criteria, leaving few opportunities for comparisons and accurate analyses using official statistical data.

In relation with these debates, this paper seeks to explain the living conditions in Spain of European retired relating both to their life course and the amenities they enjoy in the destination areas. Tourist housing estates and infrastructures and comfortable and cheaper flight connections are factors that condition their stay as retired people, after in many cases having visited Spain for years or decades during their working life. Various situations regarding their life such as their demographic features, family relations, community networks and transnational mobility lead the retired to behave as mobile individuals. Yet as they become older and as foreigners in another country, living in Spain also poses scenarios that they may have to cope with. Individually, life abroad could become a daily challenge when it comes to accessing health or social services, or, legally, when keeping their social and economic rights recognised by the EU.

**International retirement migration, a variegated catalogue of situations**

Essentially, retirees migration is characterised by a highly significant level of mobility. Even though officially there has been a change of residence that is recorded by an official source, retirees, in general and in Spain, are quite mobile and tend to travel to and from their country of origin and destination once or several times a year (as the period of reference). Neither population censuses nor records, as official and general-purpose sources, have been adapted properly to take account of the versatility of mobile human behaviour (Poulain and Perrin, 2001), which has little to do with the ‘standard migration’ of

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\(^1\) There were identified in the Parker’s paper (2005): permanent migrants; family reunion migrants; foreign-born persons; temporary work migrants; persons admitted temporarily as students; persons admitted temporarily for business; deportees; assylum seekers; refugees; persons admitted to the State for other humanitarian purposes. These types are mainly consistent with those identified in scholarship tradition (Bailey, 2001).
workers. Among the categories referred to by Parker as being most common in international migration, the ‘foreign retirees’ category might be similar to ‘retiree migrant’, but is only used as such by Australia (Parker, 2005). It does not appear in the “Glossary on Migration” (IOM, 2004). Furthermore, the generalization of tourism-related movements (United Nations, 1998; Williams and Hall, 2000; Poulain and Perrin, 2001), that are particularly common among retirees according to their prior experience (Rodríguez, 2001), poses inevitable irregularities when it comes to separating retired migrants from senior long-term tourists. In this respect, the place of residence plays a key role to define rights and duties (Garrido, 2003), especially for retirees who have registered with the authorities. However, their legal and residential status may be a secondary fact that depends on the length of their stay, their personal or family interests, because they enjoy economic and social rights in their country of origin or of destination, or on their interest in having their legal status registered.

In these conditions, Spanish sources, like in many other countries, find it very hard to register retirees' movements, because there is no explicit definition of this type of migration. The 2001 Census defines the person who migrate in relation to their current residence and the residence of a previous moment in time (one or ten years), to the year in which the person arrived at their current residence, or to the temporary residence in a given place. The Residential Variation Statistics measures migration as the change that takes place in the municipal register when a person moves to a municipality, but without recording other details about the person or his or her movement. Other sources are even less specific because they only record the non-European economic immigrants who apply for a work and residence permit (Casado and Rodríguez, 2002; Rodríguez et al., 2004).

Broadly speaking, sources do not always agree when it comes to defining some of the elements used to identify retirees, such as a) the difference between a migrant, or the person performing the movement, and migration or movement, giving rise to different numbers, when one (or many) can perform one or more movements in a reference period, b) the decision regarding the age at which migrants are deemed to be elderly, or retired, or

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2 For a more complete appreciation of those residents at a municipal level, the 2001 Census has created the concept of ‘linked population’, as those habitual residents in Spain which have some type of regular links with the municipality (they reside, work or study there), or, not being residents, they are in the habit of spending there (certain) periods of time (holidays, weekends,…) (Vinueza, 2004).
pre-retired, c) the definition of residence and its characteristics to try to differentiate between tourists, residents and other types of movers, d) how to define the length of time spent at the place of destination and the nature of the period of time (permanent, seasonal, temporary), e) the differentiation between administrative concepts such as nationality, place of previous residence, place of origin, place of birth (Williams et al., 1997; Casado et al., 2004), or legal concepts (registered or not) that are used to assess under-registration (Williams et al., 1997; Rodríguez et al., 1998). The lack of any administrative definition of retired migrants combines with the fact that retirees themselves find it hard to identify their situation in Spain (Gustafson, 2002). Therefore under-registration has become a common situation, in relation to the lack of reliable information about retiree migration. Rodríguez et al. (1998) put forward several reasons, such as the preference to live in anonymity, the temporary nature of their stay in Spain, the fact that they do not need to register because they are EU citizens, or the lack of information about how to register. Other times, reference is made to the "red tape" and that being registered brings no benefits (Andersson, 2002) or the suspicion that they might lose social and economic rights in their country if they are found to be living in Spain (Schriewer, 2004).

The retirees from Northern European countries who live on Spain's coasts respond to a stereotype that, due to its very lack of definition, has the features of a resident, a migrant and a tourist, thus contributing to their statistical opacity (Cazes, 1998). A senior tourist becomes an older migrant by just setting up residence for a longer period of time than the average as tourist and this is quite common in tourist areas where a bunch of different types of moving people share spaces (resorts) and times. This tourist behaviour tends to create the necessary conditions for long-term or permanent residence, especially if repeated visits are grounded in 'tourism-dependent social networks' or established year-to-year social or family 'networks' (Williams and Hall, 2000). A tourist could become a resident when retirement comes (Moreno et al, 2004) and seasonal homes are used permanently (Kuentzel, 2005). Tourists, migrants and residents could be interchangeable types in the same space during a fixed period of time. To reinforce this behaviour, retired are endowed with a long 'holiday' period in their life course as the definite opportunity that had not been enjoyed during the working life.
For the retired, residence, as a legal fact, and home, as a living component, are combined in a physical space, the house where a ‘retired’ ‘tourist’ stays when he/she changes status and becomes a ‘resident’ on the coast after have ‘migrated’, either permanently or seasonally (Warnes, 1994; Williams et al., 1997; O’Reilly, 2000; O’Reilly, 2005). If permanently, a retired resident behaves as a ‘tourist’ for a time when going back to visit the family, friends or other relatives, or just spending summer holidays in the origin country (Gustafson, 2002). If seasonally, he/she acts as a ‘reverse tourist or migrant’ depending on the basis (home) he/she has (it is expected he/she has changed the residence to Spain). Now, a mixed phenomenon is appearing, commonly referred to as ‘residential tourism’, based on a discontinuous stay throughout the year, seasonal in many cases (Leontidou and Marmaras 2001; Gustafson, 2001), with a dominant consumption-led relationship at the destination and the use of non-hotel accommodation (SOPDE 1997). Williams et al. (1997) refers to a ‘continuum’ ranging from legally registered permanent residents to tourists, and including non-registered residents, the seasonal residents who use their stay as a step towards a predictable permanent residence, owners of second residences or long-term tourists. Home ownership and the length of stay in the destination country are the essential criteria for trying to differentiate between tourists and elderly migrants (Warnes, 1994; Betty and Cahill, 1996; Williams and Hall 2000; O’Reilly, 2005). The social and symbolic space between these two accepted deviations (residence, tourism) is very narrow, often questioned, often ambivalent, as pointed out by Gustafson (2002, p. 910). Nevertheless, it seems that 6 months is being taken as the threshold of a more permanent residence in relation to certain social commitments, rights and legal obligations that residents must meet if they wish to obtain certain benefits and services.

However, retired foreign residents try to make it clear to the Spanish and visitors in the municipalities where they live that they are different from tourists per se, distinguishing between the areas where the retirees live from the noisier and less environmentally attractive areas that tourists tend to use (Rodríguez et al., 1998) and that contribute to foster anti-tourist attitudes among the native population.

From a viewpoint of migration history, there are other sides to the image of retired immigrants. Retiree migration is a phenomenon linked to people's life cycle and the final stage of a migratory project, thus giving rise to different types, depending on each person's
previous history, in accordance with factors that have to do with "their origins, educational and vocational training, family history, material wealth and rights associated to the receipt of welfare benefits" (Warnes, 2003). In this respect, retiree migration may be the result of former workers retiring in situ (Dwyer and Papadimitrou, 2003; Moreno et al., 2004), or kin amenity migration, when one's family is in a different country to you (Moreno, 2004) or the result of the demand for a suitable place to spend the last years of one's life when health problems appear, conditioning people's lives (nursing home mobility).

**Migration conditions**

Human mobility is not, generally speaking, an autonomous process, but instead is conditioned by factors relating to objective and subjective circumstances. These factors are especially important in the case of the elderly because people's age adds another specific factor, their own life cycle, in which their current behaviour is deeply rooted and justified. Why retired foreigners move to Spain can be explained away with theoretical approaches that have already been proven elsewhere, but the factors, which are nearly always the same everywhere, are sometimes specific to the personal background, place and time in question.

The retired foreigners who live in Spain form a population group that is not very numerous in relation to the elderly population of their countries of origin, but that is a select and influential group in Spain. It is a population with a balanced gender structure, a slight predominance of men, with a masculinity index of 112, in contrast to the Spanish elderly population. This indicator is built around childless couples or single men who migrate, who accept the risk of migrating at advanced ages. As this population ages, women end up in the majority, although this influence is likely to be reduced by the number of women who return to their country of origin upon becoming widowed. Another phenomenon associated with the specific nature of this population, and that occurs in the areas of Spain with the largest numbers of retired immigrants, is the overaging of the Spanish elderly population due to the added effect of elderly foreigners: in Andalusia and the Valencia Region, Spanish elderly people account for approximately 16% of the total, while foreign elderly people account for 25% of all resident foreigners. This inflow is not natural, but induced by the retired senior citizens who migrate to tourist resorts.
This population group also has other special features that one could summarise as follows (Casado et al., 2004): they tend to be ‘young elderly’, the average age barely topping 65 years, though almost one in five is more than 75 years old; they tend to have been living in Spain for around 10 years, showing that they retired young; a large number of them are homeowners, and very often they have paid for their homes in cash; their sources of income are a combination of state and private pensions, their third source being productive investments; in view of their level of education and their profession before retiring, a large number of them have come from skilled and liberal professions. In short, it seems that migrants come from medium to higher deciles of income in the first step of retirement, performing an amenity move, which is consistent with the ability and willingness to move.

In these conditions, it seems appropriate to point out that retirees move in favourable, even privileged social economic and personal conditions (Gustafson, 2001), that form part of ‘amenity migration’ (Walters, 2000), and make it easier to adapt better to, and also to be welcomed by Spanish society. It is a voluntary decision, part of a fully residential strategy in search of better economic conditions (Andersson, 2002), accepted in most cases, motivated by people's own characteristics and not by the wish to ‘flee’ an oppressive environment in the place where they live in their country. Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that the retirees who move to another country only represent a very tiny percentage of the total number of possible migrants, because for many people changing their country of residence in these conditions can be an insecure, risky and traumatic process.

Inarguably, they find it easier to decide to move if they have already had a previous migration experience, either as work migrants or else as tourists who have travelled to Spain several times. The first case is relatively infrequent, while the second is quite normal.

In the case of Southern Europe, the traditional tourist resorts attract most of the European retirees who want to enjoy the amenities typical of the established tourist resorts, such as the Algarve in Portugal or Costa del Sol and the Costa Blanca in Spain, that have attracted a large proportion of British retirees almost on a permanent basis. This prior experience has been documented as a playing a key role when people decide where to retire.
to, according to several studies conducted in Europe (King et al., 1998; Rodríguez et al., 1998; Williams et al., 2000; Rodríguez, 2001; Casado et al., 2004)\(^3\).

This gives rise to a pattern of behaviour that involves remaining *loyal* to the destination, through repeated trips either themselves or by their children and relatives, provided that the environmental conditions allow them to enjoy their free time, the tourist resources are suitable enough to attract enough demand at any time of the year to make the stay satisfactory, and the spatial attainability is sufficient to reduce the friction of the distance as much as possible. Once this loyalty mechanism is in place, their behaviour is conditioned by people's psychological motivation (active and enthusiastic tourists and residents), and ends up attracting more tourists and retired residents, in the words of Lieux (1994) and Kuentzel (2005), provided that the conditions necessary to attract people and for tourist housing to be turned into residential housing remain in place. In Spain, that sort of behaviour has already been diagnosed when it is affirmed that residential tourists are “the result of a satisfied and loyal holiday tourist” (SOPDE, 1998, 360).

The loyalty mechanism, among others, is being reinforced by the growing importance of the type of tourism that involves visits by (and to..) their children, relatives and friends. Indeed, different studies have confirmed the significance of this seasonal mobility of resident retirees and of their children and relatives as visitors (Rodríguez et al., 1998; Williams et al., 2000; Huber and O’Reilly, 2004; Breuer, 2005) and their personal significance as a means of reasserting their independence and autonomy (Gustafson, 2001). This system brings into play a large number of personal conditioning factors, starting with the very physical and emotional distance that appears between the retirees in Spain and the relatives who visit them or who they visit, or the availability of housing at the place of origin and destination in which to stay during their visit (Casado et al., 2004). Other key factors are directly related to the economic globalization and the internationalization of individual patterns of behaviour, through processes that are becoming increasingly frequent. For example, in recent years there has been an increase in the volume and purchasing power of British tourists visiting Spain, prompted by the cheap flights offered by low cost airlines in recent years (Hardill et al., 2005; Rodríguez et al., 2005). Finally,

\(^3\) Niedomysl (2005) thinks that tourism, in general, increases the destination attraction even in the case of rural areas.
another fact worth noting is that when retirees return to their country of origin at some point of the year, quite often other relatives or friends use their home in Spain for holidaying. Furthermore, these retired residents and repeat tourists are followed by other groups who come to provide an economic base and associated services for both groups (O’Reilly, 2000).

All these situations define a modern lifestyle in which priority is given to patterns of mobility, consumer values and enjoying life in amenity areas, going beyond the traditional pattern of behaviour associated to ‘permanent migration’ (Gustafson, 2002; Casado et al., 2004), as a result of which their satisfaction with a life with two places of residence, of seasonal mobility between Spain and their country of origin, is clearly related to the sensation of well-being that they perceive (Warnes et al., 1999; Gustafson, 2001). At the same time, the two-way ties between tourism and retiree migration are bolstered.

Another essential condition for retired Europeans in Spain and their tourist and residential behaviour is the climate, that is to say, taking advantage of conditions that are unique in Europe, such as a mean annual temperature of 18º, more than 3,000 hours of sunshine a year and scant rainfall, conducive to leading a more relaxed, quality lifestyle, oriented to living outdoors and making much more of one's free time. In any instance of international literature, about any type of space, the climate is always mentioned as the main condition that attracts tourists (Gómez, 2005) and retired migrants, and the situation is idealized through tourist stereotypes with a predominance of pictures and images relating to the sun and beaches, to its healthy nature (Warnes et al., 1999; Gustafson, 2002; Andersson, 2002) or with the more open lifestyle that it facilitates. Indeed, not only does the climate create favourable environmental conditions, but it is also associated with an informal and relaxed lifestyle in a natural environment conducive to leisure, social, and cultural activities (Betty and Cahill, 1996; Rodríguez et al., 1998). The informality is to be seen in the fact that they are not subject to strict hours and closed buildings, although that creates psychological and social problems for people who are used to rules and regulations both at work and in their social life. Engaging in these types of activities is the necessary outcome of living alongside people with similar interests, in a cosmopolitan social environment, albeit with problems in adapting to and living with the native society.
Nevertheless, in the established Mediterranean tourist resorts, the climate is often associated with extreme environmental (periods of extreme heat, drought, fires, floods) and social phenomena (over-urbanization, overcrowding), that appear repeatedly in the discourse of tourists and retired residents alike (Rodríguez et al., 1998; Gómez, 2005). In other coastal regions, the overcrowded tourist resorts mean that the principles of sustainability cannot be met (Barke and Towner, 2003; Vera, 2003), and this tends to limit the amenity as the main pull factor. In the future, the validity of the human settlement model will not prevail unless further emphasis is placed on the sustainable nature of residential areas. If these negative trends remain unchecked, it will lead to a downturn in the trend for retirees to relocate to Spain, or to a change in that pattern, with people moving to other, more environment-friendly areas in Spain or in other Mediterranean countries (Croatia, Bulgaria, Tunisia). The traditional images of tourist villages on the Costa del Sol or the Costa Blanca might lose their appeal and instead become a trap from which retired residents in particular will find it hard to escape (Karisto, 2004).

**Access to health and social services as scenarios for retirees’ life**

Retired foreigners in Spain pose a contradiction with regard to health care: on the one hand, they are aging and therefore one would expect a larger demand for health services due to the higher prevalence of chronic diseases, on the basis of the universal right to access health services enshrined in EC regulations; on the other, they feel in and report a good state of health, broadly speaking, and tend to lead an active life. Many of them declare to have moved from northern Europe to get their health improved (Warnes et al., 1999).

The use of public health services by retired foreigners in Spain implies taking account of several related situations. One is the availability of the European health card, which came into force on 1st June 2004, replacing the paper forms such as E-111 and E-128 that foreigners had to complete when coming to Spain for short stays. It is an individual document that certifies that the elderly person is entitled to receive the benefits during a temporary stay in Spain, on equal terms to the inhabitants of the country that they are visiting. The card is regarded as contributing to the construction of the European identity by giving elderly retired Europeans the chance to access health services (Echezarreta, 2005) by coordinating the health protection systems of the EC countries. However, the restrictions
imposed by each country's regulations are still too strong not to be taken into account (Hardill et al., 2004) by retirees when they decide the best residential strategy with a view to obtaining appropriate health care. There are different ways of accessing health services using various combinations of public and private schemes (Dwyer, 2001), one of which implies the use of private and public health services, in the latter case often returning to their country of origin for certain types of medical care, albeit while still living in Spain.

Although it is true that they are entitled to receive medical care, the Spanish health system does have its limitations, namely a certain lack of information and the fact that the quality of care varies from one region or municipality to another (Spreadbery et al, 2003). Another major restriction is the shortage of social and health service staff (Hardill et al., 2004; Echezarreta, 2005) when compared with standards in Northern European countries, especially the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. These difficulties arise when it comes to looking after the physically or mentally impaired, who cannot look after themselves and lack a family or social environment capable of looking after them. These problems may be very similar to the ones they would face in their own country, but the false perceptions of living life to the full in a ‘strange’ place, the economic hardships and the family and social isolation, prompted by the multiple situations and patterns of behaviour of the members of each generation of families (Ackers, 2004), are stronger when one lives in a foreign country. The contrast seen when comparing the care that they receive to the care received by Spanish elderly people, who stress the importance of the family as the main care provider, is quite striking. In this regard, voluntary social networks (foreigners' associations, self-help groups, own churches, etc.) leverage on their own experience to advise and help people with health problems (Moreno, 2004), as do the doctors and consular staff of their country when the only solution is to return to their country of origin, where the welfare system, relatives and friends can be essential if the person is in a state of dependency and deep depression (Andersson, 2002).

The fact is that health problems grow larger when communication difficulties are seen to exist between doctor and patient in public health sphere when describing symptoms or receiving advice, on account of the fact that many retired Europeans do not understand Spanish. Although the situations are very different, there seem to be three facts in common: one, that Spanish towns do not limit retired foreigners' access to health services on
linguistic grounds, though the lack of qualified personnel can limit their access; two, that several volunteer associations provide interpreting services in hospitals in several Spanish regions such as the Costa del Sol (Benalmádena) and Majorca (Betty, 1997; Betty and Cahill, 1999); and three, that, due to the communication barrier, many foreigners prefer to rely on the medical care offered by doctors of their own nationality (Andersson, 2002).

Another social factor to consider is the distress that the sick suffer as a consequence of their own socio-demographic circumstances: they tend to be elderly people, who live with their spouse or on their own, without any relatives nearby, so when they are admitted to hospital, there is nobody to accompany them and help them wash, get changed or talk to. Besides, in this situation they face a culture shock when they have to share the health resources with Spaniards, sharing the space around them with people who they cannot talk to.

They know very little about their rights as European citizens, because they have no prior experience of seeking medical attention in a country other than their own. Even those who have paid for health insurance and therefore are entitled to more personalized care may find it hard to understand exactly what they are entitled to and where they can get the right treatment. Other people are imprudent, do not have enough health insurance and rely on their right to receive emergency care, but then find that they cannot get treated for chronic diseases or receive other types of treatment.

Taken one stage further, the situation of retired Europeans in Spain not only focuses on the provision of health care, but also on their rights as European citizens. EU regulations seek to ensure that the nationals of any Member State are treated in the same way and enjoy the same rights and benefits in any Member State, by fostering reciprocal agreements between them. However, the real situations vary in line with people's legal residential status, their personal and housing tax status, health costs and Social Security rights. Health costs are complicated to calculate, due to the different types of emergency care that the residents of another country are entitled to receive; the availability and quality of public and private health care, which retirees regard as high quality, encouraging them to register in Spain as permanent residents; private health coverage and their own individual care needs. The stronger their perception regarding the quality of the health service, the more incentives they have to use the Spanish health system, which can also have tax repercussions. The basic decision that European retirees living in Spain have to make about
health care is whether or not to register as permanent residents, regarding to remain entitled to receive health benefits in their country of origin, to rely on their private health coverage and to be entitled to emergency health care in the destination country. This stratagem is consistent with this age group's younger members' tendency to move back and forth between their country and Spain, and to spend a certain amount of time each year in their country of origin. The elderly and those in a poorer state of health, on the other hand, tend to register with the Spanish public health system.

**Retirees in local environments**

The retired foreigners who live in Spain need to know what services are available and which ones they are entitled to receive, and that information is not easy to come by. In Spain, if you live in one municipality or another, you will be subject to one set of rules (at several levels of administration) or another.

Spain's central and regional administrations have not enforced any general policies for attending to the needs of retired Europeans\(^4\). The regional governments are responsible for providing social services, but give local councils the powers to programme, coordinate and provide general social services, community services or primary care services, all of which are very often run on a joint basis with private organisations (Moreno, 2004). This system has made considerable headway in terms of legal regulation, the human and material resources provided and its social recognition, but is still lacking in terms of the recognition of the right to social services, due to the pressure of demand, because people are still required to provide proof of their situation of need, as well as justifying that they do not have enough financial resources and that they are registered in the municipal census. This evidences the contrast between the practical universality of the social services system, enshrined in the law, and the selectivity that prevails due to the shortage of resources to cope with the growing demand.

In the case of political and voting rights, socio-political ties between local councils and the community of foreigners have a specific dimension in the context of EU

\(^4\) The Strategic Plan for the Elderly for 2003-2007, Ministry of Social Affairs, and the regional regulations only take the position of analysing the situation of the foreign retirees in Spain, regarding the specific care policies for the foreign elderly (Echezarreta, 2005).
membership, which fosters the movement of people, economic capital and ideas and that enables everyone to enjoy the same social and political rights. Foreigners are setting up their own religious, social and leisure associations that serve a dual purpose, namely to safeguard their identity (Betty y Cahill, 1996), and foster self-help and a certain informal economy (O’Reilly, 2000), though the associations almost always tend to forge ties among themselves, rather than with the local authorities and society. Inside the communities themselves, the discourses asserting political rights are constructed in different ways, but they do tend to demand such rights as a part of their integration in Spanish society (O’Reilly, 2002). Meanwhile, some Spanish coastal municipalities (Mijas, Benalmádena, Calviá, Alfás del Pí, etc.) have created Foreigners’ Departments to foster the integration of foreigners, making it easier for them to find out how the local council works and about their rights by publishing free leaflets with local information in several languages. In some cases, such as Fuengirola, Malaga, a Foreigners Advisory Committee has been set up in the town to channel information to the Council about the demands of the residents of each nationality and to encourage residents to register and contribute to the municipal budget.

As for participation in local politics, initiatives are moving at a slower pace. The retired foreigners in Spain show no particular interest in politics, as might be expected at this point of their life cycle, they do not feel represented in local matters and they are not worried about this lack of representation (Durán, 2003). Their interest in local and municipal matters is limited to issues that have a bearing on their housing estate and the services that they want to receive. However, present conditions foster political participation in municipal and European elections. Since 1995, any foreigners who have registered as residents with the local authorities are eligible to vote and be elected in local elections. Having said that, the turnout among foreigners in the recent municipal and European elections was not very high: in the municipalities with the largest percentage of retired foreigners, only 15% to 20% of registered residents also registered to vote, though these percentages were somewhat higher if one considers the number who registered to vote in terms of the number of European residents (Rodríguez and Warnes, 2002; Méndez, 2004). Turnout is influenced by geographical factors (the size of the municipality and the percentage of foreign residents), social factors (individual interest in taking part and foreigners’ membership of groups and associations) and political factors (whether local
councils and political parties are interested in getting them to vote, depending on the political situation in the municipality) (Méndez, 2004). The next few years will give a clearer picture of how important foreign residents are, as the efforts made by their local councils prompt them to feel that more attention is being paid to their interests and thus they feel more politically involved (Echezarreta, 2005).

From this perspective, there would seem to be a need to conduct further in-depth research into the future of the geographical areas of Spain where retirees prefer to go, in order to identify certain dimensions that are essential for understanding this phenomenon. One of them is the community that retirees themselves, their associations and self-help groups have been building for years as the critical mass of retirees of certain nationalities has grown larger and larger in certain municipalities (Huber and O’Reilly, 2004): retirees' sociological components serve to define their own patterns of behaviour and their relations with the host society and all of this calls for a more detailed study of all the national communities of retirees.

The second dimension is far more economic. Based on the idea that retirees are not just a mass of specific consumers, the future of these communities can be organized both on the basis of the particular economy that they generate (housing market, consumer goods, the services that they are offered, the resources that they demand, etc.) and from the perspective of a controlled economy. In this case, a look at North American retirement communities could trigger the debate as to whether the model of specific residential establishments for retired people is a scenario to be considered in the future. Some examples are already emerging in Spain, in the form of joint ventures between Spanish real estate firms and consortiums from their countries of origin, both interested in channelling demand (retired Europeans) towards a high quality product (residential estates for retirees) that is designed to meet each and every one of the needs of the retired Europeans who decide to live out their retirement in Spain. Examples such as Santa Pola Life Resort on the Costa Blanca or Vitania on the Costa del Sol mirror this trend. What remains to be done, therefore, if necessary, is to define the economic and social models of these estates and analyse the strengths and weaknesses that this trend might generate. Without serving as a strict reference model, the North American experience can be leveraged upon to study the

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5 http://www.santapolaliferesort.com/
broad typology of communities of retired people, with a view to assessing if there is a need in Spain for what have customarily been labelled as ‘havens for retirees’ (Streib, 2002;) and the personal and financial conditioning factors that make them decide to move to retirement resorts (Longino et al., 2002)

Thirdly, in the future attention will also have to be paid to a socio-political proposal at local level. In this case, once again, a difference is to be seen between how the situation is addressed in the United States, where, for several years now, there has been a strong tendency to foster non-metropolitan and rural areas (Rowles and Watkins, 1993; Walters, 2000), as being the most appropriate for the efficient expansion of retirement migration, implying a certain degree of planning of the process, and what occurs in climate amenity areas of California, Arizona and Florida. In Europe, and particularly in Spain, there is no official policy on promoting and attracting retired Europeans to amenity resorts. However, proposals have been put forward that stress the need to combine forces at local level to ensure that retired residents' economic, social and political rights are recognised within the European Union, in order for ‘European retirement resorts’ to be identified as resorts with a hallmark of quality that potential residents will recognise in the future (Echezarreta, 2005).

Several different criteria would be used to define the quality of the place of retirement, most noteworthy being the setting up both of ‘foreigners' departments’ inside local councils to make it easier for retirees to adapt to Spanish society, and of ‘advisory councils’ to let foreigners pass on their suggestions and proposals to the town council, the definition of the structure of social resources in the municipality for use in the ‘municipal elderly care scheme’, encouraging the use of different languages within the municipality to allow people from different countries to communicate with one another, or the definition of guidelines for preserving the municipality's environment.

In short, the situation of retired Europeans in Spanish municipalities, far from becoming less important, is gaining in importance by the day, because it is the local councils who are responsible for most welfare policies. In the future, further planning seems necessary if the perverse effects of the market economy are to be stopped from overshadowing human aspects in the socio-political context of the European Union.

REFERENCES


