

To stay or to go? The Motivations and Experiences of Older British Returnees from Spain

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Introduction

Retirement is a time when people can seek new opportunities away from the world of work, which for some includes international mobility. Within the EU, some retired people choose to exercise their rights and freedoms as EU citizens to move to another EU country. Spain is a popular retirement destination for older British people, due to its warm, sunny climate, which is attractive in itself as well as in enabling a more active and outdoor lifestyle. Whilst costs have gone up in recent years, Spain is also still relatively cheap compared to the UK, enabling older people with a limited income to pursue some of the recreational activities in Spain that they could not afford to do in the UK. Most older migrants move following retirement when they are in the third age of life, who are using retirement as an opportunity to seek new adventures and seek personal achievement and fulfilment (Laslett, 1991). Subsequently, retired migrants have been conceptualised as 'lifestyle migrants' (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009), as they are seen as a group of relatively affluent individuals moving abroad full time or part time, permanently or temporarily to improve their quality of life (ibid).

Research on the migration of retired people has therefore been developed over the past decade, and has included the reasons for moving (King et al. 2000), as well as the lifestyles adopted and social networks developed as part of a healthy retirement in Spain (Gustafson 2009; Casado-Diaz 2009). The focus of research to date has therefore been on the lifestyles of migrants within the country of migration. However, more recently there has been a growing recognition that retired migrants often return to their country of origin, especially following the onset of old age (Rainsford 2011; Hall and Hardill, 2014). Return is often undertaken to access the welfare system including care, to access financial support or to be close to family and friends. In addition, since 2008, the number of returnees has increased as a result of the economic crisis (Huete et al. 2013). Much of the evidence on returning older British migrants has however been anecdotal and reported through media reports and

up to date there has been no substantive analysis of the number of older British returnees and the experiences of those who do return.

This paper therefore considers the factors that influence the return decisions of retired migrants from Spain. It considers the structural enablers and barriers, as well as the personal and social reasoning that takes place when making a return move. It considers the forces and structures that facilitate and inhibit migration decisions, as well as the role of individual agency in return reasoning, including the emotional, psychological and social dynamics of return. In doing so, it combines quantitative data from the Spanish Registry with interview data collected by the authors. The chapter is structured as follows. After this brief introduction, the chapter details the research methods, followed by a discussion of the reasons for return organised around health/care, financial and social reasons. The chapter then moves on to explore the process of returning from Spain and the structural, social and emotional challenges this can bring, including the financial difficulties of returning, the difficulties in accessing support from the British welfare state and challenges of re-integrating. In doing so, the chapter reports on the psychosocial wellbeing of older returnees.

The Research Studies

This chapter brings together data from three studies on the return migration of older British people from Spain undertaken by each of the authors. The three studies together included five data sources. First, quantitative Spanish Registry data was collected on the number of returnees. Second, narrative interviews were undertaken with 25 older British people in Spain who were planning a return move to the UK. Third, five narrative interviews were conducted with returnees who had re-settled in the UK. Fourth, 24 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with representatives from organisations involved in supporting returning British migrants, including UK based charities active in Spain, local government representatives and health workers in Spain. Fifth, 40 posts from online social media sites were gathered including from the online forum for expatriates 'Eye on Spain.'

The research studies were undertaken between 2006 and 2015. Older people were defined as being over the age of 50 as this encompasses early retirees, those who have reached state pension age, as well as older 'fourth agers' which is a time associated with dependence and decline (Laslett, 1991). Subsequently, the age of the migrant interviewees ranged from 51 to 93 years (the average age was 76), and includes those who had recently moved to Spain as well as those who had been living there for many years. Interviews were all transcribed and analysed thematically using a coding framework that was devised based on both the theoretical interests guiding the research questions, as well as on the salient issues and recurring ideas that arose from the interviews (Attride-Stirling 2001). The chapter uses quotes and case study examples from these interviews to highlight some of the key issues uncovered around return migration. The identity of individuals and their location in Spain has been protected.

Retiring to Spain: The Lifestyles and Movements of Older British Migrants

There has been a massive growth in the number of retired British people moving overseas. The most popular retirement destinations include Southern European countries like Spain. Retirement migration within the EU has been enabled through the interplay of individual experiences and structural factors underpinning international migration. Structural enablers include increased global interconnectivity especially within the EU since the development of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which enabled the free movement of EU citizens. In addition, improved international travel through the advent of regular and cheap flights, the growth in social media and communication technology enable people to stay in touch regardless of time and space. Furthermore, established British communities and tourist infrastructure in Spain, make it particularly popular as both a holiday and retirement destination. The Spanish 'Costas' are especially attractive to older migrants, with its scores of purpose built tourist and residential complexes, known as 'urbanisations', that have their own shops, restaurants which cater for British tastes, as well as personal service outlets which sell British products (Huber and O'Reilly, 2004). They also have a vast array of British run social clubs which feature heavily in the social lives of retired migrants. These urbanisations are subsequently host to large British communities who tend to be segregated from the Spanish

community. Levels of integration are low among older British people in Spain, with most speaking little or no Spanish and rarely interacting on more than a casual basis with Spanish people (O'Reilly, 2000).

Spain has been a popular tourist destination for many decades. Many retired migrants start off as holiday makers, then become second home owners and finally many make a permanent move to Spain following retirement. This indicates a complex interplay of structural enablers and individual experiences that underpin decisions to migrate.

Retirement migration is therefore rarely a single move from one country to another and may involve constant movement back and forth between the country of origin and country of migration (as well as other places). Subsequently, the growing body of literature on lifestyle migration recognises such forms of movement as an 'ongoing quest' in search of a better way of life (Benson, 2011). The concept 'lifestyle mobilities' as outlined by Duncan, Cohen and Thulemark (2015) instead refers to an ongoing lifestyle choice that blurs the boundaries between travel, leisure and migration. This is especially the case for retired migrants who are not constrained to a particular place by paid work and, subject to the financial means, have the opportunity to engage in onward mobility or return at any time. Often termed 'transmigrants', retirees may have multiple dwellings and create a 'home' in more than one place, with their lifestyles and identities transcending the boundaries of multiple countries (Eimmerman, 2014). This includes multiple home ownership, as explained by one of our interviewees, a charity worker in Spain:

Many [retired migrants] have more than one home. That's because their financial state allowed them to have those two homes, and secondly, that may mean that they haven't really made the decision to move to Spain. They want the lifestyle when they want it, but they always want a safety net at home, and they are very well off, and they can afford it.

Retirement can therefore act as an enabler for migration; however conversely, old age can also place a considerable constraint on post-retirement mobility. Increased frailty and bodily decline can result in immobility and physical and mental constraint. Age therefore brings a distinct dimension to return migration and mobility research; rather than a return move being part of ongoing mobilities, a return move for frail, vulnerable older migrants is often

finite and indicates the end of their lifestyle and identity as a migrant. The return migration of older British people from Spain to the UK has begun to increase over the decade or so. This could be linked to the economic crisis or the ageing of the baby boom population who moved en masse to Spain from the 1990s who are now returning to access care and support in their old age. These reasons for return are discussed below but first we draw on Spanish registry data to explore the number of British older returnees from Spain.

Number of Older Returnees from Spain

Data generally underestimates the number of older British people living in Spain due to high levels of non-registration. Older people often choose not to register because their lifestyles are highly flexible and mobile as discussed above, with some retirees calling multiple places 'home'. In addition, some people choose not to register so that they can retain access to the British NHS and welfare system (as soon as someone registers as living in Spain they lose their entitlement to most welfare services in the UK) (Coldron and Ackers, 2007). Spanish registry data in 2015 indicates that there are 161,306 registered British citizens over the age of 55 living in Spain, of whom 104,368 are over the age of 65 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2015). However, when non-registration is taken into account, it is estimated that there are around half a million British people over the age of 50 living in Spain with 14% of those bring over 70 (Finch et al., 2010; Sriskandarajah and Drew, 2006).

Accurate statistics on return migration are even more difficult to obtain. Some return migrants do not inform their local authority in Spain that they have moved on, and even fewer declare where they have moved to. Subsequently, even if we know someone has left Spain, it is not always clear whether they have returned to the UK or moved elsewhere. Spanish registry data does however include the return migration of those who register and indicates that there are growing numbers of older British returnees, with 4,339 registered British people over the age of 55 returning to the UK between 2008 and 2013 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2015). Over 15,000 more British people over the age of 55 left Spain in this period but the destination was unknown (although it can be assumed that many of them returned to the UK). The number of older returnees peaked in 2013 with 1,744 returnees to the UK reported in this year compared with only 236 in 2008.

Return migration is having a considerable effect on some towns and villages in Spain with large populations of British residents. Research by Giner (2015) indicates that 8% of the older British population of one Spanish town returned to the UK between 2008 and 2013. He also found that 59% of the same population would consider a return move indicating the large scale of return migration in some areas. The number of British returnees in 2013 also vastly exceeded the number of new arrivals at a scale of 364 returns for every 100 arrivals (Giner, 2015). Therefore, the population of older British people in Spain appears to be declining (although a recent spike in the value of the pound against the euro may flip this pattern). The next section explores the reasons why older British people are returning to the UK from Spain.

To stay or go? Reasons for Return

Our interviewees indicated three key reasons for returning that are explored here; returning for care, returning for social support and returning for financial reasons. We did find that making the decision to return to the UK was not a straightforward process and most of the migrants we spoke to went back and forth in their decision on whether to stay or return, with some changing their minds multiple times. It is therefore impossible to consider return migration decisions and processes without looking at a range of factors in both the migrant's country of origin and country of migration. Return migration therefore involves the complex interplay of a range of factors including structural, social and individual (Cassarino, 2004). This includes financial resources, social integration and networks, and individual expectations and aspirations.

For older migrants, the main reason for return is to access care and support in the country of origin. Evidence suggests that care features prominently in the reason for a return move and the main reason older British people return from EU destinations is to use the national health and social care systems of their home country (Hall and Hardill, 2014; Ackers and Dwyer, 2002; Warnes *et al.*, 1999). Whilst British state pensioners are entitled to access health and care services in Spain to the same level as a Spanish national, there are considerable differences in the health and care systems between Spain and the UK. The most significant structural difference is the existence of a family model of care in Spain

compared with a more individualist British society meaning that in Spain, older people are largely the responsibility of the extended family rather than the state. Subsequently, there is very little state funded care (community or institutional) in Spain as explained by one interviewee:

When you come out of hospital, it doesn't matter how ill you are, you are on your own. (Female interviewee in Spain, aged 79)

Those who are fully integrated and speak Spanish appear much less likely to return as they are in a better position to navigate health, care and support services in Spain. Having Spanish friends can also help and it not only enhances integration, Spanish friends can be a vital source of support in navigating bureaucracy and services, as well as providing translation during times of need. For those who do not speak Spanish (which includes most of our interviewees), navigating health and care services can be extremely challenging. Language and cultural differences cause two key problems; they prevent people from obtaining care in the first place; and if care is obtained they cause communication barriers between the carer and person needing care. Whilst translators are available, they may charge and also be of limited use during hospital stays or for care at home, therefore, when British migrants in Spain have complex care needs, they may find that they need to return to the UK. However, the structural context of the welfare state and state provided services can play a significant role in determining return migration decisions.

Experiences of lifestyle migration associated with living the 'good life' (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009) can therefore change in the context of ageing and bodily decline. Health factors are often the initial stimulant for return; however other often related factors can become apparent following the onset of old age. This includes returning for personal social networks of friends and family who can provide care and support during old age. Extended family ties feature highly in return reasoning for migrants of all ages (Eimmermann, 2014), but may be even more important for older, vulnerable people. Informal social support from family and friends is especially important in coping with a crisis, such as a rapid decline in health or the death of a partner. The socio-spatial context of migration therefore becomes important here, as the family of most retired migrants in Spain live in the UK, as explained by one interviewee who was returning for the care and support his family could provide:

We were very happy with living in Spain but unfortunately we are returning to the UK because my partner has the beginnings of dementia and I have heart problems. We have found the health care in Spain is good but our family have insisted that we return to the UK especially as there is little help for someone with dementia and we can't speak sufficient Spanish to access what little help there is so we have decided our family are right we will sell and return to the UK. (Male Interviewee in Spain, aged 71)

Returning to be near to family can either be as a direct result of care needs, or can be a more latent pull and might for example include the birth of a grandchild. Research has indicated gender differences in return motivations, especially when it comes to returning for family reasons. Women are much more likely to want to return to be close to family and especially grandchildren as an interviewee from a charity in Spain explained:

People tend to miss their grandchildren very much and that can ultimately be what takes them back. And there is usually... one partner who wants to do that. The other one normally says: "we can go there sometimes, and we can see how it goes". I see that is the greatest reason... and it is usually the woman who wants to go back and support the family.

Many of our interviewees were able to maintain strong ties with their UK based family through visits, communication technology and social media; however they still experienced homesickness and a general decline in their social relationships with friends and relatives and this had a negative impact on their psychosocial wellbeing:

Skype is wonderful but is no substitute for a hug. I think that you have to be a bit selfish and hard to cope with not being with the family. Homesickness is the price you pay for doing your own thing. Unless you make frequent flights back you will miss out on family occasions – happy and sad. I am sure that homesickness is a major factor in the decision of many expats who choose to go back to the UK. (Blog Poster)

I met a lady who said she had never bonded with her new grandchild as she lived in Spain and the baby was born in the UK. (Blog Poster)

For these interviewees, return was undertaken to re-engage social networks and relationships. This was often based around the idea of 'home' being where family are based. Bolognani (2014) refers to romanticised imaginings and affective ideas of coming home which Eimermann (2014) argues can gain momentum in return migration reasoning. Those who hold these idealised images of UK as being 'home', often struggled to be happy in Spain. As Betty and Hall (2014) found, a longing for family can result in loneliness and isolation among migrants, especially for women:

Since I was divorced and living on my own I have become very lonely. Yes, my sons in the UK keep in touch with me by email and telephone calls, I have recently found out that cancer which I had was in remission and now it has returned, so I will return to the UK so that I can be near my family. This will mean that I won't be lonely and I can get treatment in the UK. (Female interviewee in Spain, aged 68)

The above noted gender differences in return motivations can also potentially cause tension between couples when one wants to stay and the other wants to return. Research has indicated that men are more likely than women to want to migrate in the first place, as well as remain in the country of migration. As Burgelt et al (2008) found, women often go along with their partner's decision to migrate, but as a result are more likely to experience poor wellbeing following migration and ultimately want to return. For those couples who cannot reach a decision about whether to stay or return, the result can be separation, as explained by one female interviewee:

My husband retired and said England has had it and I am going to live in Spain. I said what about me? He said it's up to you. I thought I would find a place to live but as I hadn't a pension of my own I had to go with him. Since living in Spain I have been back to England many times to find a place to live – couldn't do it. I was told I shouldn't live alone and a care home is where I should go because I have cancer.

The final reason for return explored here relates to economic factors. Links between care and financial hardship have been previously noted (Betty and Hall, 2014; Hall and Hardill, 2014) and as our interviewees indicated, paying for private care in Spain when state funded care services are unavailable can quickly deplete financial resources. Furthermore, fluctuations in the value of the euro against the pound can impact on return decisions. As

the earlier statistics indicated, there was a general rise in return migration from 2009. This ties in with the economic crisis as underpinned by some of our interviewees who felt forced to return when they saw the value of their British state pension plummet once converted into euros:

As the years have gone by, people that grow older, and because of the financial crisis money has to last longer, and the lifestyle that they had when they retired, is not now as it was. (Charity representative in Spain)

I dreamt of living out the rest of my days at my apartment in the sunshine. That dream has turned sour as every day I am consumed with total worry as I simply don't have enough money to live on. The pension's not enough and I can't receive more from the State so I must go back to the UK. (Female interviewee in Spain, aged 65)

Therefore, the economic crisis (Huete et al., 2013) coupled with general increase in costs of living in Spain has led to a general decline in spending power. Some older migrants faced financial hardship whilst others were forced to reduce their 'luxury' spending, including on social and recreational activities which ultimately had a negative impact on their social wellbeing. For some of our interviewees returning to the UK provided access to financial support including for example pension credit and housing benefits:

I am finding it more and more difficult to manage on my pension plus my savings are rapidly disappearing. Electricity has gone up, the general cost of living has also risen. My community fees have increased. It seems that everything I need to enjoy my retirement in Spain has also gone up, so I intend to return to the UK where I may be able to get some help. (Female interviewee in Spain, aged 78)

What is evident from the above discussion is that return migration can either be part of the retirement 'plan' and therefore voluntary, or could be more 'forced' as a route to care or financial support in the wake of a crisis. There has been a clear distinction in the migration literature between 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration. Whilst this normally refers to asylum seekers and refugees, we argue that similar distinctions can be applied within the context of lifestyle migration. Whilst not 'forced' in the same way as those seeking refuge from war for

example, retired lifestyle migrants may feel forced to return to the UK to seek welfare and support in their old age. Some people make the positive decision to return as they feel it is the right option to them following a change in their circumstances and as Ackers and Dwyer (2002) note, a return move for care may feature highly in the retirement 'plan' for older people living abroad. For other migrants, returning was not a plan as such and presented itself as the result of a crisis. This included those who could no longer live independently but had no support systems (most frequently care) in place. The following section therefore considers the level of choice and control exercised by older migrants when returning to the UK.

Return: A Natural Outcome or Failed Migration Project?

Migration theories refer to return migration as either a 'failed migration experience' or as the 'natural outcome' of a successful migration project (Cassarino, 2004). As indicated in the above section, the return of British migrants from Spain can occur either out of choice to be close to family or in response to a health or financial crisis indicating different degrees of choice in the decision to return. Referring to labour migrants, neo-classical economics approaches see return migration as a failure in the migration experience when the outcomes of migration do not live up to expectations. This is arguably linked to a lack of pre-migration planning, which for retired migrants may include a lack of planning for old age especially a decline in health. Conversely, new economics of labour migration theories refer to return migration as the 'logical outcome of a calculated strategy' following the successful achievement of goals as part of a well-prepared migration project (Cassarino, 2004:3). Applying this to retired migrants, return migration can form part of the 'retirement plan' for people who never intended to move permanently. As stated by Vathi and Duci (2015), return migration from this perspective can be seen as being the 'natural' end stage in the migration process and as constituting homecoming (also see Koliatis et al., 2003).

For some interviewees, returning to the UK was entirely voluntary and part of the retirement 'plan'. Return was undertaken by choice through the exercising of agency and is linked to the enhancement of positive psychosocial wellbeing which could be obtained from a lifestyle back in the UK. Such 'strategic return reasoning' (Eimermann, 2014) can form part

of the flexible and mobile lifestyles undertaken by retired migrants and is highly indicative of lifestyle mobility; an ongoing journey with no clear end point. Some of our interviewees talked about their life in Spain as a 'trial' and return was always on the cards:

I think at some point I will have to go back to the UK but I knew that when I came here. But if we get some really nice weather and this arthritis eases up and I am able to do a bit more and I think I will leave it until next year...I have put myself on trial to see if I am any better here in Spain than I was in England. (Female interviewee in Spain, aged 68)

On the other hand, some of our interviewees felt 'forced' to return to the UK in response to a crisis, which for many included a considerable and rapid decline in health either in themselves or their partner. These 'forced' returnees tended to be those who experienced a crisis and had no coping strategies in place to deal with them. This can be linked to a mismatch between expectations and reality and has been termed 'post migration ambivalence' (Eimmermann, 2014; Benson and O'Reilly, 2009). This can be related to insufficient preparation, especially for old age. For some of our interviewees, the expectations of care and welfare support in Spain did not live up to the reality and so they experienced a shock when they needed care or financial support and it was not readily available to them. Some older migrants who experience a decline in health are reluctant to return even though they know it is their only option, as explained by a charity worker in Spain:

People phone me and they say they don't know what to do, and they think they ought to go back to the UK. And then, they say: "or just wait and see if things get better". Even when I talk to people from England and they are in Spain, I can tell on the phone things are not going to get better. It's a pipedream.

For those without family support in the UK, returning for health reasons was even more traumatic:

A lot of the problems that we encounter is the fact that the people who don't have family in the UK feel they're going into a big black hole, and there's nobody to hold their hand or help them. (Representative from a Charity in Spain)

Feeling forced to return arguably made these respondents highly vulnerable, and had a considerable impact on their psychosocial wellbeing. This includes unhappiness upon return and difficulties reintegrating into the country of origin. Return migration has been linked preparation and resilience. Vathi and Duci (2015) refer to some migrants as active agents in defining crisis and in employing strategies to counter the negative effects of crises by developing strategies of resilience. Applying this to the retired migrants in this study, we found that those who were active agents by developing coping strategies for the negative effects of old age (including putting care and support in place) generally had a more positive wellbeing in old age and were able to choose whether to stay or return. Therefore, for some this involved a planned return to the UK, and for those who did not want to return, the ability to stay in Spain with appropriate care and support plans in place for old age. On the other hand, older migrants who were not active agents in anticipating and preparing for old age were the most likely to encounter an unwanted return to the UK.

The Process of Return and Re-Integration

This section looks at how older migrants cope upon return to the UK, as well as the actual process of returning which for some can be physically, emotionally and financially traumatic. We focus here on rights to welfare and support upon return, selling/buying property, as well as the social and emotional consequences of re-integration

Structural Constraints to Return

Returning to the UK is not always straightforward. Residency restrictions, as well as the emotional and physical impacts of returning, can result in significant challenges. For returnees, accessing immediate support upon return to the UK can be difficult due to complex UK residency restrictions. Our interviewees referred to the 'safety net' of the UK and most assumed that as British nationals was a plethora of welfare agencies waiting to offer support when they return (as previously indicated by Age Concern, 2007). However, in reality, if a British national decides to return to the UK permanently after taking up residency abroad, they may not be automatically eligible for any support. In order to claim

income-related benefits (e.g. housing related benefits, Pension Credit), someone must have both a right to reside and be 'habitually resident'. Whilst returning British citizens automatically have the right to reside, to be classed as 'habitually resident' they must pass the Habitual Residence Test along with any new immigrant to the UK. The Habitual Residency Test was introduced in August 1994 and only those who can demonstrate that they have a settled intention to stay can pass it as a representative from a charity in Spain explained:

The Habitual Residence Test affects everybody who is planning to return to the UK. Basically... one has to prove that one's intention is to become habitually resident before one is eligible to claim any benefits or allowances.

Depending on individual circumstances, passing the Habitual Residency Test can take from as little as a few days to three months and then applications for benefits can take an additional two to three weeks (Age Concern, 2007). For those returning for care, it can also be difficult to access care services immediately upon arrival as any claimants must be living in the UK i.e. applications should not be made from Spain. Even once living in the UK, there are long waiting lists for Social Services assistance and new returnees may not be given priority. Therefore, the safety net of the British welfare state was an unrealistic expectation for returnees, again demonstrating the tension between expectations and reality for returning migrants.

The Financial Impact of Returning

As outlined above, financial factors can trigger a return, including returning to the UK to access the British welfare system including financial benefits. However, we also found that financial factors can also play a considerable role in the actual process of return. In addition to the costs associated with returning (e.g. transport of possessions, cost of the flights), for those who own property, the property market in both countries were found to play a significant role in facilitating return. A weak economy and property market in Spain posed a massive challenge for some of the returnees in our studies. Many interviewees spoke of the difficulties they faced with selling their property in Spain and many were forced to drop the

selling price and lose money. A boom in the UK property market over the past few decades further exacerbates the financial consequences of this. Subsequently, older people who have lived in Spain for many years were unlikely to see the financial return on their property in Spain that they would have seen in the UK. Many were forced to downsize upon return to the UK or move back to a different geographical area from the one they left which had a negative impact on their psychosocial wellbeing. One interviewee explained that to return to the same village she left around 15 years before, she would need financial help from her daughters:

This house won't pay for a maisonette in England. The village I want to be in... It is about 200,000 for a one bedroom. I want a two because [daughter] is going to help me. When I sell this, she is going to sell her own to give me the money to put towards the 100,000 to help me buy a place and then my two daughters want to try and have a small mortgage to pay the rest for me. (Female interviewee in Spain, aged 79)

Some of our interviewees who intended to return became 'stuck' in Spain due to the financial constraints associated with the property market. One lady explained that following the death of her husband she decided to return to be close to family and friends; however when she looked into the value of her property in Spain and what her financial resources would buy her in the UK, she subsequently made the decision to stay:

I wouldn't be able to afford to go back. And certainly not into where I want to go because they are very, very expensive, so I am afraid I will have to spend my last years here. (Female interviewee in Spain, aged 78)

For some people, the UK was seen as a safe haven, especially during times of economic crisis:

I think more and more are realising, especially during these times of crisis, that the UK isn't such a bad place if you are left with nothing. People have learnt they are very much on their own. Unfortunately, for some it is already too late, they are stuck in a country that they cannot escape due to the inability to sell property. Some have just thrown the keys into the bank and gone home. (A blog poster)

Therefore, whilst viewed as a safety net, the UK does not provide the plethora of welfare benefits and support expected by returning migrants. In fact, retired British migrants are subject to many of the same regulations as all new immigrants to the UK as discussed above.

Returning to a Life that no Longer Exists

Upon returning to the UK, some older migrants re-integrate successfully and are able re-establish meaningful ties with friends and family. The following quote from an older returnee couple highlights a situation where returning was the right decision and one that enhanced their overall wellbeing:

We have settled down nicely thank you and not missing Spain at all. We have had a lovely summer in the UK so it's not about the weather but being where we belong.

(Male interviewee in the UK, aged 71)

The social capital and networks for some returnees are larger in the UK than in Spain and these interviewees generally refer to home as where their family live. Therefore, transnational networks, especially family relationships, are important facilitators for return. However, for others, the imagined does not match up to the reality of return. Eimmermann (2014) argues that imagined geographies of home can create high expectations of 'home' upon return; however these may not be realised. Migrants are often ill prepared for their return as they do not realise how their home country and personal relationships have changed since they left (Gmelch, 1980:143). Friends and family left behind have often moved on and developed new relationships and so are not always enthusiastic about resuming old ties. This is referred to as 'reverse culture shock' (King, 1977; Kenny, 1972), after which some return migrants they may consider re-migrating (Cassarino, 2004; Gmelch, 1980). Cassarino (2004) found that those migrants who are transnational and have retained ties with people in the home country, are more likely to successfully re-integrate upon return. Conversely, those who do not retain links with the country of origin are often 'helpless' upon their return (Cassarino, 2004:7). This was explained by a charity representative:

If we have a situation where usually the person is on their own, they may have relatives in the UK who may be very supportive and come over and help out. They may have relatives in the UK who want nothing to do with the person. You know? "You have chosen to live in Spain? That's your problem".

We also spoke to older returnees who returned to the UK because they missed family and friends or because of pressure from family to return; however upon return, the returnees found that they had themselves moved on and started to remember why they had left the UK in the first place.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the return migration of a subset of lifestyle migrants; those who are older and retired, many of whom are facing a decline in health and are in need of care and additional support. Therefore, the reasons for return and experiences of this group are considerably different to those of working age. In particular, health factors play a significant role, with return often being to access care and support from the country of origin. This support may be from either the welfare state or more informal family ties. What is also important to note here is that whilst younger healthy retirees are a highly mobile population, older frail migrants are more immobile and their return to the UK marks the end of their migrant lifestyles.

This chapter has drawn on Spanish registry data to support previous anecdotal reports (e.g. Roberts, 2013) that there has been an increase in the number of British returnees from Spain since 2008. We also found that in some villages and towns in Spain, returnees are beginning to outweigh those who stay (Giner, 2015). This may be partly attributed to the ageing of the baby boom population who migrated to Spain from the 1990s who are becoming frailer as a result of declining health. Many of these returnees are not prepared for old age and the challenges this brings to financial, health and social resources. Many move to Spain expecting the same level of welfare and care as provided in the UK when in reality the Spanish welfare state is underpinned by a family model of care. Limited welfare

benefits and care services for older people in Spain are often not anticipated by British migrants leaving some feeling forced to return to the UK.

Conversely, some do not anticipate the challenges associated with returning to the UK, which can be a lengthy and costly process (financially and emotionally). Some returnees expect to be able to gain instant access to UK support services and also may not consider that if they have been living outside of the UK for a considerable period of time, there may have been changes to the health system and services they expect to use. Furthermore, the support they may anticipate from family and friends in the UK may be imagined and in reality, social networks upon return are sparse as family and friends have moved on. This indicates the importance of good preparation both pre-migration and pre-return supporting prior research that highlights the importance of strategic planning (Eimermann, 2014) to avoid unnecessary or unwanted return.

For older migrants who wish to return to the UK, the actual process of returning can be extremely challenging, especially for those who are frail and have considerable health problems. There is some assistance for vulnerable or 'distressed' British nationals from organisations such as the British Consulate and the Heathrow Travel Care Repatriation Project. These organisations have recognised the difficulties that older migrants can encounter when they return to the UK and offer some support both in Spain and upon return to the UK. There are also a number of British charities active in Spain that provide advice and support to older British people. This for example includes Age Concern Espana and other charitable organisations, which a number of our interviewees had used for guidance and support with their return.

To conclude, return decisions and experiences of older British migrants in Spain are influenced by a complex interaction of structural, social and individual factors. This was evident from the initial decision to move to Spain, through to the decision to return to the UK. Structural factors include formal welfare structures and entitlements including to health, care and financial support. Informal social networks also play a considerable role in facilitating both migration and return. At an individual level, the personal health and finances of older migrants can enable migration as well as facilitate decisions around return. Scholars have begun to consider migrants' preparation, coping strategies and resilience in

relation to return migration (Vathi and Duci, 2015). Similarly to this research, we also found that those who are more resilient and well prepared, are in a better position to choose whether to stay or return and in particular are less likely to feel forced to return in the event of a crisis.

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