

## **Back to Brit: Retired British Migrants Returning from Spain**

### **Abstract**

Since the seminal research of O'Reilly (2000) and King et al. (2000) about British citizens on the Costa del Sol there has been a surge in the publication of lifestyle migration papers, books and research. Nonetheless, there is a part of the lifestyle migration process that has been rarely explored: a return move to the country of origin following retirement migration. Research has indicated a broad increase in the number of older British returnees, yet there has been no substantive research on the topic. This paper therefore attempts to fill this gap by using Spanish registry data to examine the number of British retirees since 2009 who have returned to the UK. In addition, the results of an electronic survey to older British people in Spain are presented which suggest that considerable numbers of British citizens aged over 55 living in the Northern Costa Blanca are likely to return in the next few years. This data therefore indicates the relevance of return migration from Spain to the UK as a significant issue to the academic community as well as to British and Spanish policy makers.

### **Keywords**

Return Migration, Lifestyle Migration, United Kingdom, Spain, Ageing

## 1. Introduction

Retirement migration is considered a form of lifestyle migration (Benson and O'Reilly 2009), which occurs as a result of a search for 'self fulfillment' or the 'good life' (Oliver, 2007). Spain is a popular retirement destination for British citizens, with its attractions including a warmer climate which helps individuals maintain lifestyles and enjoy outdoor activities that can enhance social participation. In addition, the cost of living in Spain, whilst increased in recent years, generally remains lower than in the UK enabling pensions to go further (O'Reilly, 2000; King et al, 2000; Hurtado, 2013).

Nonetheless, these factors do not hide the existence of difficulties and problems in the process of arrival and settlement in Spain. For example, as people age there may be issues such as the death of a partner, loneliness, physical and social isolation, loss of purchasing power, disabilities, the need for healthcare and/or social care can make some people consider returning after some years of more or less continuous residence in Spain (Betty and Hall, 2014). Also other research supports the view that some older British people are returning to the UK to access both formal and informal support in their old age, especially as their resources (health, care, financial, social) for independent living diminish (Hall and Hardill, 2014).

Little is known about the number of older British people in Spain, and even less about the number of returning migrants. Data on retired migrants is difficult to capture due to the flexibility of retirement migration patterns, with many

spending time in multiple countries and may therefore not register in Spain. Some media outlets have made their own interpretations, often exaggerated, about the number of returnees, especially from Spain (Prior, 2014, Olive Press, 2014). Moreover, accurate data on international migration is difficult to obtain, especially in the EU where data is often not systematically collected.

It is important to consider the impact that return migration may have on Spanish and British welfare services, especially in the health and social care sector. Some choose not to register in Spain in order to preserve their rights to health and welfare services and benefits in the UK. Returning migrants represent a challenge for British health and social care services as it would result in a rising demand from older migrants with high levels of need.

In an attempt to fill this significant gap in literature, this paper draws on Spanish Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) data to provide a descriptive analysis of the number of older British returnees from Spain. Data from 2008 to 2013 is presented indicating the number and demographics of returnees. It also draws on survey data to offer an overview of the return intentions amongst British expatriates living in Alicante.

## **2. Return Migration: A Theoretical background**

A lack of data on the returning process, and also the difficulty in reaching those who return have led to some scholars referring to return migration as an invisible stream (Hurtado, 2013:198) or a '*hidden community into a hidden community*' (Rutter and Andrew, 2009). As such, there have been a lack of

studies on return migration, especially among older retirees. There are several reasons behind the neglect of return migration. First, the difficulty of measuring retirement migration. Measuring return after retirement migration is even more problematic, due to the non-registration of a highly mobile population and the touristic profile of some of the movements. Second, to date scholars have largely focused on the positive outcomes and lifestyle of retirement migration. The difficulties or needs of retired migrants, which can result in a return move, are rarely considered. It must be considered that under this scheme there is a social construction working among both scholars and host society: British retired migrants constitute a homogeneous group of fairly wealthy people that represent a positive impact on Spanish economy. Of course, there is no place in this socially constructed reality, not only for return migration, but for considering the vulnerability, isolation or bereavement that may lead to a return move (Giner, 2013).

Spain has become a popular country for people to retire to, especially British citizens (Finch, Andrew & Latorre, 2010:29). In addition to permanent migrants, there are large numbers of British seasonal visitors, tourists, seasonal residents and transnational workers. Thus, retired migrants are a highly diverse group making it difficult to estimate the actual number of British citizens in Spain. Moreover, one of the main problems is the under-registration of British citizens, which often occurs when they do not perceive the obligation to register. Non-registration also occurs when people do not want to lose their right to welfare support gained in the United Kingdom or think registering would result in higher taxes (Hall & Williams, 2002; Rodríguez, Lardiés, & Rodríguez, 2010). Therefore, looking at the registry data on return migration may not offer a clear

image on what is actually happening (Giner & Simó, 2009; Huete, Mantecón, & Estévez, 2013). Not, at least, without analysing the way in which return migrations are recorded in the Spanish statistical system.

From a theoretical point of view, return migration has been in the academic agenda since migration studies began. It was in 1885 when Ernst G. Ravenstein published his well-known paper on the laws of migration. Ravenstein (1885:187) affirmed that every migration stream has its own counter stream. In doing so, he indicated that there is no data for those who are part of the counter stream. Despite this, early 20<sup>th</sup> century researchers tried to calculate the number of migrants returning to the birth country. This includes William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, who stated that 15 to 20% of Polish migrants in the United States of America were returning to their origin country (1918-1920: vol.III, p.12).

Other attempts to study return migration date back to the 1950s. These were small studies, using ad-hoc questionnaires or interviews (Bovenkerk, 1974). From the 1970s and 80s, the reasons for return migration were classified into three areas: economic (Gmelch, 1980), sociocultural (Philipott, 1968) and emotional (Anwar, 1979). Nevertheless, there were still difficulties in studying the phenomenon, especially due to the lack of quantitative data (Klinthall, 2006).

All of the studies stated above are in the field of labour migration (Appleyard, 1968; Bovenkerk, 1974; Cerase, 1974; King, 1978; Gmelch, 1980). Another branch studying return migration to the origin country upon retirement is by

population geographers, developed recently and focused on movements after a previous labour migration. This is however a different issue to migration after a retirement migration, especially as the average age of return is lower, and destination countries are different, generally due to the emotional ties and familiar and social links formed through the original labour migration (Bolzman, Fibbi & Vial, 2006; Bessy & Riche, 1993; De Coulon & Wolff, 2010).

The first research that fit into the area of return after a retirement migration came in the late 70s (Longino, 1979). Following Litwin & Longino (1987) there exist three types of migration among retirees: migration immediately after retirement, under good conditions of health and wealth, otherwise known as lifestyle migration (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009); return migration in old age following a decline in health or other crisis towards family members who can provide support or care; and finally, return migration following illness or disability towards health and care services (Litwin & Longino, 1987).

Return migration involves a complex relation of structural, social and individual factors (Cassarino, 2004). Among them, one of the most important reasons that explain a return move after retirement migration is a decline in health or the emergence of disabilities (Longino, Jackson, Zimmerman, & Bradsher, 1991; Speare, Avery, & Lawton, 1991; Rutter & Andrew, 2009). The need for care is often cited as a reason for returning to the UK from Spain (Hall and Hardill, 2014). Some retired migrants do not register in their new country and therefore live in legal limbo with limited access to health and care services (Betty & Cahill, 1999; Hardill *et al.*, 2005; Hall, 2011). Other reasons for return include the death of a partner to seek social support from family or to obtain financial support from

the country of origin which is not available in Spain (Bradsher *et al.*, 1992), or family and other emotional ties with the homeland that can suggest to an older retiree that return to the birth country can help reintegration (Percival, 2013; Bolzman, 2013; Holmes and Burrows, 2012).

Fluctuations in exchange rates and therefore pension amounts may be facilitators in the return process (Byron & Condon, 1996; Hall and Hardill, 2014). The recent depreciation of the sterling pound against the euro, or future movements of this kind, may be playing an important role in return decision-making (Rutter & Andrew, 2009). Levels of integration into the host society may also impact on return motivations, including the availability of services, products or the origin country's media (Palo & Longino, 2001).

Moreover, at the level of motivation, return migration can be explained and experimented in terms of failure or as the expected outcome of a successful migration project (Cassarino, 2004). On the one hand, it could represent a failure of the migratory project as long as some of the factors explained above make difficult to stay in the host country. On the other hand, return migration can represent a voluntary movement towards a country that offers better conditions (health, care, pensions, etcetera), as a part of a 'strategic return reasoning' (Eimermann, 2014).

In terms of measuring return intentions, at the European level, Warnes *et al.* (1999) conducted a survey directed to older British citizens living in Tuscany, Malta, Costa del Sol and the Algarve. They used a self-completion questionnaire completed by 957 British residents (293 of whom living in the

Costa del Sol) aged 50 and more who lived in those areas for at least 6 months a year. They found that only a minority of retirees, 18.7%, intended to return. The survey asked what factors would increase the likelihood of a return move to the UK, and they found that even in the situation where someone had to give up their home, 25% of the British citizens surveyed declared that they would stay in their retirement destination. Other studies which measured intentions to return for older migrants also suggest low number of potential returnees, with Huete's (2009) survey indicating a 10% potential return rate among British retirees. Qualitative estimations also indicate low return rates among British retirees in Spain. O'Reilly (2000:98) stated that even when looking at the wishes on death of expatriates from Fuengirola (Costa del Sol), most didn't want their body to be repatriated. Therefore, prior research indicates that return intentions are low among older British migrants in the EU. However, except indicative survey data, to date there has been no substantive research into the number of people returning. By using Spanish registry data to explore the number of older returnees from Spain, and a survey to examine their intentions to return, our paper therefore provides a significant contribution to the existing body of literature on return migration.

### **3. Methodology**

Given the difficulty in studying return migration, a double approach is proposed, using two different sources of quantitative data. First, we have used micro data of Residential Variations Statistics (RVS) from the Spanish Statistical Institute (INE). This dataset is taken from the Spanish Register (*Padrón*), an annual



record which records the main characteristics of the population: including age, sex, place of birth, nationality, municipality of residence and origin of migration. Anyone living in Spain for more than six months is entitled (and is legally required) to register into the *Padrón*, even if they are irregular migrants. The *Padrón* records migration patterns of residents, including in-country and international movements. There is a requirement for registered citizens to confirm their inscription (compulsory since 2009 for European Economic Area citizens) every five years and if someone does not do this, it is assumed they have left the country and this is recorded on the *Padrón*. Therefore, the register is compiled using both the declarations of registered citizens and the expirations of those who don't.

There are at least two things to take into consideration when using this dataset. The first one is under-registration, that is, those who decide not to register themselves on the *Padrón* (Hall & Williams, 2002; Rodríguez, Lardiés, & Rodríguez, 2010) and therefore, become unregulated citizens, even when they hold European citizenship. This is quite common among retired migrants in Spain who may spend part of the year in the UK (or elsewhere) (Hall and Hardill, 2014). In fact, there is no official estimation of how many unregistered Britons are living in Spain. Nonetheless, the British embassy estimated in 2010 that 75% of the British community living in Spain is unregistered, although there is no evidence and some indicators indicate much lower numbers of unregistered migrants (INE, 2012). The second issue to consider is return or onward movement without deregistering from the *Padrón*. Those who do not confirm their registration after five years are removed from the *Padrón* and the register would record that they had moved to an unknown destination. This is a

common issue as from 2008 to 2013, 78% of the de-registration of British people in Spain have an unknown destination. Despite these issues, the *Padrón* register and RVS are still the best datasets to analyse the number of migrants as well as return processes, because there is an interest of being registered in the place where one lives in order to access public services like health care. In addition, population coverage of the *Padrón* and RVS data –theoretically universal– is higher than any other sources including the British International Passenger Survey, which is based on periodical samples in airports, ports and railway stations.

The analysis of the RVS has been made at the Spanish Province level, that is, the third administrative level after the State and the Autonomous Community levels. After this level there are the municipalities, but the INE doesn't provide the results of those with less than 10000 inhabitants. So, when dealing with the municipalities, it must be considered that the data reflects only those towns with 10000 inhabitants or more. When analysing the data, we selected from the micro data RVS files: people with UK nationality who were living in the provinces of Alicante and Málaga and moved back to the UK between 2008 and 2013.

Our analysis of both register and survey data is based on a population over 55 years, which has been widely used as a starting age in the analysis of retirement migration (Huete, 2009; Rodriguez, Lardiés, & Rodriguez, 2010; Huete, Mantecón, & Estévez, 2013). However we also analyse other age groups over the age of 55 years.

The second source of data is an electronic survey conducted in the northern Costa Blanca between the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2014 and the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2014. The survey was designed to understand the opinions and expectations of British retired migrants living in that zone, who represent 15% of the total population and 25% of the population, aged 55 and more<sup>1</sup>. The survey was circulated with the help of local charities, social organizations, volunteers, and web pages, local Universities of the Third Age, municipal councillors and informal community leaders. At the end of the period a sample of 216 people completed the online survey, out of an estimated number of 19,940 British residents over 55 years in that area. The survey respondents included a good representation of men (48%) and women (52%); coastline (81%) and inland towns (19%); and ages (from 55 to 88 years, average age 68.8 years). The survey uses the 9 indicators of return intentions as previously used by Warnes et al. (1999). These indicators were one of the first attempts to measure the extent to which the British retired community would return in the event of a number of hypothetical events including individual events such as the death of a partner, and structural factors such as an increase in taxes. Using the same individual factors as Warnes et al (1999) enabled a comparison of return intentions spanning over 15 years, both at the Spanish level (with Costa del Sol territory) and the other European destinations for British retired citizens analysed (Algarve, Malta, and Tuscany). However, in addition to the 15 year gap, there are some differences between the two surveys on the territory, the type of questionnaire or the socioeconomic background of respondents. Data analysis was performed with SPSS™ 22.0, using Chi-Square tests and Student's T test for two independent samples.

#### 4.1 Number of Older British People in Spain

In Spain there are 385,179 registered British citizens (Continuous Municipal Register Statistics, 2014). British citizens represent a 0.81% of the total population living in Spain and 6.94% of the total foreign population. There are 201,843 registered British people in Spain over the age of 55 which represent 27.71% of the total foreign population aged over 55 years. The average age of British people residents in Spain is 51.3 years, almost 10 years above the average age of the Spanish population, and over half (52%) of all British people in Spain are over 55 years. British are the fifth nationality in Spain in an average age classification, after Switzerland (56 years), Norway (54.2), Finland (53.4) and Luxembourg (52.5). The average age of EU migrants has been growing over the last decade, especially in certain coastal areas of Spain such as Alicante where the average age of British residents is 55.56 years, more than four years higher than the average age of all British residents in Spain. The average age of British residents in Málaga is however slightly younger than that of Alicante and Spain, maybe because of the continued arrival process in the last six years.

**Table 1. Average age of British residents in Spain, 2008-2013**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Spain</b>	48.60	49.11	49.72	49.98	50.56	51.29
<b>Alicante</b>	52.82	53.35	54.02	54.22	54.80	55.56
<b>Málaga</b>	48.24	48.69	49.35	49.31	49.80	50.50

Source: INE, Continuous Municipal Register Statistics

The 201,843 British residents over 55 years in Spain are not distributed equally across the Spanish territories. Whilst younger migrants tend to live in the cities

of Madrid and Barcelona, as previous research has indicated (O'Reilly, 2000; Hall and Hardill, 2014), older migrants tend to live along the coastline, mainly in the southern part of Spain, (from Málaga to València), in the Balearic and Canary archipelagos. (see Figure 1). In some of these provinces the British population is significant: Balearic Islands (4.20% of total registered British population over 55 years), Santa Cruz de Tenerife (5.88%), Almería (6.32%), Málaga (19.69%) and Alicante (41.49%). At a local level, some municipalities have more than 30% of British citizens including some at the hinterlands of Mijas (Málaga) and Orihuela (Alicante). These hinterlands represent 21% of the total British over 55 years registered in Spain. In fact, 19 of the 25 municipalities with the highest rates of British registered citizens in Spain are in the Alicante or Málaga provinces.

**Figure 1. British residents over 55 years distribution in Spanish Provinces, 2013**

Source: INE, Residential Variations Statistics

As Figure 2 indicates, the age structure of the British in Spain shows an ageing population, with 44% of all residents being over the age of 60 and 10% being over the age of 75. This increases to 43% and 55% over the age of 60 in Alicante and Málaga, and 12% and 13% over the age of 75 respectively. It has to be recognised that there is a fairly significant young population (aged between 5 and 24 years) in Alicante and Málaga, who are likely to be the children of adult migrants who arrived in the last ten years to run businesses and services to attend this group's demands (Simó & Giner, 2012; Huete, Mantecón & Estévez, 2013).

## **Figure 2. Age and sex structure of British Residents in Spain, Alicante and Málaga, 2013**

Source: INE, Residential Variations Statistics

Overall, there are more British women than men in the register. That is especially significant for the population under 55 years. Otherwise, over 55 years the ratio is the opposite with more men than women at all ages including over the age of 70 years. This is contrary to the higher average life expectancy of women, so it can be only explained by other factors. Knowing that most of the couples are heterosexual, and most of the marriages are between the same nationalities, there are two possible explanations: first, a greater proportion of women do not register on the *Padrón*; and second, there is a higher return movement amongst women (see below).

### **4.2. Older British People Returning to the UK**

Our data indicates a considerable increase in the number of British people returning to the UK between 2008 and 2013. Whilst historically the main migration flow is of young British residents, mainly workers (Huete, Mantecón, & Estévez, 2013), from 2013 the trend changed with returnees over 55 years representing 49.59% of the total returnees. Therefore, almost half of the population returning to the United Kingdom are over 55 years.

The origin of the returnees at the local level was considered. Taking into account that those areas with less than 10,000 inhabitants were excluded (as

data was not available), at the Spanish level returnees come mainly from the Mediterranean coast, archipelagos (Balearic and Canary), Madrid and some of the Northern provinces (A Coruña, Biscay and Asturias). The data indicates a significant concentration in Málaga (especially Alhaurín el Grande, Alhaurín de la Torre and Mijas). In Alicante the returnees mainly come from Orihuela and Torrevieja and from the towns of the northern coast. The rest of the Spanish provinces only sum 50 or less returnees in the period from 2008 to 2013.

### **Figure 3. Number of British returnees over 55 years from Spain, 2008-2013**

Source: INE, Residential Variations Statistics

The RVS shows that 78% of the de-registration location remains unknown. As stated above, this lack of information is caused by the administrative verification process, started in 2012, in which false and unconfirmed residents are being detected. Nonetheless, the main migratory known flow from 2008 to 2013 was the one of returning to the United Kingdom. Other popular destinations are the United States of America, France and Germany, which is the second preferred country in the case of those over 55 years. The declared return of British citizens from Spain suggests that, from 2008 to 2013 a total of 4,339 people over 55 years returned to the UK, most of them from Alicante (53.31%) and Málaga (14.34%).

**Table 2. Mobility of British Citizens by main destination, sum 2008-2013**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>+55</b>
<b>UK</b>	10,596	4,339
<b>Other countries</b>	1,375	244
<b>Expiration</b>	155	6
<b>Unknown destination</b>	44,090	15,961
<b>Total</b>	56,216	20,550

Source: INE, Residential Variations Statistics

The return movement of British citizens from Spain has been increasing over the last few years, not only for younger migrants who may struggle to find work during the economic crisis, but also for retirees. While overall return has been growing at a rate of 190% between 2008 and 2013, return over 55 years has grown at a rate of 638% and over 70 years at a rate of 1025%. There was a massive increase in returnees between 2012 and 2013, especially when compared with previous years. Possible explanations may be linked to the economic –and construction– crisis (Huete et al. 2013; Kershen 2009) but also with the baby boomers who arrived prior to 2000 becoming older and frailer (Hall and Hardill, 2014).

**Table 3. British Returnees from Spain categorised by age groups, 2008-2013**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Over 55 years</b>	236	428	685	583	663	1,744	4,339
<b>Over 70 years</b>	58	114	235	207	252	653	1,519
<b>Total (all ages)</b>	1,212	1,299	1,581	1,484	1,503	3,517	10,596

Source: INE, Residential Variations Statistics



The 4,339 returnees represent 2.43% of registered British residents over 55. The two main territories for British retirees in Spain, Alicante and Málaga, are also as would be expected the main territories for returnees, especially Alicante which has the greatest number of older migrants. In 2013, Alicante represents 54.64% of the registered British returnees from Spain, while Málaga represents 18.23%. The ratio between arriving migrants to Spain and those who return has changed in the last few years. Whilst overall there are still more British people arriving in Spain than leaving, in 2013 in Alicante, there were 30.46 returnees for every 100 arrivals (see table 4). Taking into account the data on those leaving Spain but to an unknown destination, (after reassigning them proportionally to the known destinations as seen in table 2), the average return over 100 arrivals is much higher at the level of total populations, between 43.82% in Málaga and 27.51% in Alicante<sup>2</sup>. Taking into account the return over registered population from 2008 to 2013, 10.09% of the registered British citizens above 55 years would have returned to the United Kingdom, 8.84% from Alicante and 12.68% from Málaga.

**Table 4. Over 55 years returnees as a % of British arrivals and British registered citizens, 2008-2013**

	Returns/ 100 arrivals 08-13	Returns/ 100 arrivals (2013)*	Returns/ 100 arrivals**
<b>Spain</b>	3.61	11.88	16.41
<b>Alicante</b>	8.89	30.46	27.51
<b>Málaga</b>	6.21	11.55	43.82

Source: INE, Residential Variations Statistics

\* Data only for 2013

\*\* Return data includes unknown destination reassigned following table 2 distribution

The internal composition of the returnee group over 55 years, in terms of gender, is balanced: in 2013 50.85% of returnees were men and 49.15% were women. Thus, it indicates a balanced return migration by couples, the most habitual form of lifestyle retirement migration (Casado-Díaz, Kaiser, & Warnes, 2004). Over 70 years the balance is favourable to men: 55.53% of men returned against 44.47% of women. The gender ratio over 85 years is the inverse: 40.63% of men returning over 59.38% of women. This pattern is repeated year after year. This trend suggests the hypothesis that women are more likely to return in advanced old age, at least at the level of registered returns. A reason for this may include the death of their partner and the higher life expectancy of women (Oliver, 2004; Giner & Simó, 2009; Klinthall, 2013). Related to this fact, the Mortality Statistics for Spain from 2008 to 2013 indicate that, in average, 64.2% of the British deaths in Spain were males (65.8% married, 16.5% widowers).

From a chronological point of view, the age of returning has increased over the last few years. This is especially visible in the population over 55 years, as the average age of return was 68.07 years across Spain, 68.39 in Alicante and 69.24 in Málaga. This indicates that the returnee profile is getting older. One of the possible explanations is that the British population in Spain is getting older, especially those who arrived between 2001 and 2007, a period during which 94,687 Britons aged 55 registered in Spain.

**Figure 4. Average age of British returnees over 55 years at the moment of returning from Spain, Alicante and Málaga, 2008-2013**

Source: INE, Residential Variations Statistics

As Figure 5 shows, the returning age of British migrants varies by area. Whilst all three areas show a spike in the number of returnees between the age of 65 and 70, the Spanish data is more homogenous across all ages; returnees from Alicante tend to be older, whilst Málaga is more mixed. Three different returnee age groups can also be identified across the pyramids: first, young people, more visible in the case of Alicante and Málaga. These are likely to be the sons and daughters of the adult returnees who leave Spain, maybe due to economic reasons. The second age group is the middle-aged, most prominently identified in Málaga, where the shape of the pyramid is more pronounced for those between the ages of 45 and 50 years. The third group is older people, which is most prominent in Alicante where the weight of the older group is higher, especially for those between 65 to 68 years.

**Figure 5. Age and sex structure of British returnees from Spain, Alicante and Málaga, 2008-2013**

Source: INE, Residential Variations Statistics

### **4.3. Survey analysis**

The second source of data on returnees is an electronic survey to British migrants over the age of 55 living in the Alicante province. The survey indicated that 29% of this population intend to return to the UK in the next few years. This figure is higher than that of previous research e.g. Warnes (1999) indicating an increase in the number of return intentions over time and also supports the data presented above.

**Table 5. Are you planning to return to the UK in the next few years**

	N	%
Yes	62	28,70
No	154	71,30
Total	216	100

Source: the authors

Our respondents were asked what issues would make them what to return to the UK. Table 6 presents the possible return indicators correlated with personal characteristics<sup>3</sup>. Chi-square tests undertaken with each variable and return intentions found no significant relationship between each of the variables and an intention to return, with two exceptions. First, having a property in the UK was a significant predictor of return ( $\chi^2=4.161$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $sig: 0.029$ ), an indicator of return indicated in previous research (Palo and Longino, 2001; Bolzman et al.2006). Having a property increases 1.5 times the probability to return to the United Kingdom in the future (OR: 1.537; 1.003-2.354). Second the frequency of visits to the UK was a significant predictor of return ( $\chi^2=14.914$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $sig: 0.001$ ), as also noted by Palo and Longino (2001). Visiting frequently the United Kingdom increases 2.2 times the probability to return in the future (OR: 2.220; 1.400-3519). Therefore, maintaining a physical presence in the home country through home ownership and return visits are related to the future intentions of returning to it. These results are linked to theories on Transnationalism, as long as they indicate ties both in the sending and receiving country (Condon, 2005). Indicators around integration in the host society, including knowledge of the language spoken by the host society seem to have no relationship with the return intentions.

**Table 6. Return intentions**

	$\chi^2$	df	Sig.
Sex	0.067	2	0.967
Age group	15.409	12	0.220
Marriage status	1.774	6	0.939
Educational level	3.536	4	0.472
Interior/coast	0.014	2	0.993
Urban/disseminate	2.462	2	0.292
Registry status	3.372	2	0.185
Year of arrival	12.273	8	0.139
Property in Spain	4.161	2	0.125
Property in UK	7.092	2	0.029 <sup>1</sup>
Have visitors from UK	0.719	2	0.698
Visits UK	14.914	2	0.001 <sup>2</sup>
Communicate with UK	1.442	2	0.486
Catalan knowledge	2.921	2	0.232
Spanish knowledge	0,344	2	0.842

Source: the authors

<sup>1</sup> Odds ratio: 1.537 (1.003,2.354)

<sup>2</sup> Odds ratio: 2.220 (1.400,3.519)

Drawing on Warnes et al's (1999) survey about what kind of future events would affect the decision to return; nine indicators based on a change to individual circumstance were used where -1 refers to a definite decision to leave Spain and +1 is a decision to stay in Spain. The first column presents the results from our survey, the second column presents the results from Warnes et al's (1999) study in the Costa del Sol and the third column represent the mean of Costa del Sol, Algarve, Malta and Tuscany from Warnes et al's survey. Our results indicate lower scores than in the original study, most of them nearer to zero, especially when comparing the results with Costa del Sol. Therefore, each of the events presented is more likely to trigger a return move to the UK, with the most likely event being an inability to run the home.

**Table 7. Stay/leave scores in response to hypothetical individual changes**

	Our survey <sup>1</sup>	Warnes et al. <sup>2</sup>	Warnes et al. <sup>3</sup>
Death of spouse/partner	0,41	0,49	0,38
Decline in Health	0,29*	0,39	0,27
1/3 income decline	0,39*	0,59	0,56
Unable to shop	0,30*	0,46	0,46
Give up car	0,27*	0,70	0,56
Unable to run home	-0,18*	0,09	-0,01
Close friends move	0,57*	0,95	0,93
Improved health	0,73*	0,96	0,94
Lottery win £100K	0,71*	0,79	0,77
Nine events	3,49*	5,2	4,6

Source: the authors

<sup>1</sup> N=216

<sup>2</sup> Scores for Costa del Sol (n=293) (Warnes et al., 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Scores for means of Costa del Sol, Algarve, Malta and Tuscany (n=957) (1999).

\* Significant difference

There is a significant difference between all of the values (except death of a partner) from the Costa del Sol in Warnes et al's survey and ours conducted in Alicante (see table 7<sup>4</sup>). Leaving apart the possible differences between the two samples, the mean differences led us to state that return intentions are not the same between the British retired residents in 1999 compared with 2014. Retired migrants today are much more likely to return to the UK as a result of a change in their personal circumstances. Nevertheless, most of the British retirees decide to stay in Spain. One of the possible explanations for this difference is based on the strong links built within the British community, something that may increase solidarity in the worst scenarios and make it easier to face difficulties (Casado-Díaz, 2009; Simó et al., 2013), and therefore, remain in the host society. Some older migrants may remain in Spain until personal circumstances force them to consider returning to the UK.

Our survey also introduced new structural indicators that may impact on decisions to return to the UK (presented in Table 8). Overall, the scores are

closer to zero with two structural events being especially likely to increase a return move. The first is a rise in control to European citizens. The sensation of being controlled is something that has been identified negatively by British, lifestyle migrants (Fox, 2004:43), with a key reason for retiring overseas is for a sense of freedom and new lifestyle possibilities (O'Reilly, 2000). The second is a decline in the quality of the Spanish National Health Service. It is widely recognised that the Spanish Health System is highly regarded among British residents (Hall and Hardill, 2014; Haas, 2013; King et al, 2000), and a diminution in the quality would prompt some to leave Spain.

**Table 8. Stay/leave scores in response to hypothetical structural changes**

	Mean <sup>1</sup>
Social conflict increases	0,22
Poverty increases	0,24
Health System quality declines	0,03
Living costs increase	0,25
Rising corruption	0,07
Taxes increase	0,08
Increasing xenophobia	0,07
Rise in controls to European citizens	0,01
Increasing number of UK citizens	0,45
Deepening crisis	0,19
Ten events	0,16

Source: the authors

<sup>1</sup>N=216

## 5. Conclusions

This article has focused on return migration; an aspect of retirement migration that has been rarely studied. Return migration has not been on the academic agenda for several reasons including a lack of reliable data, and a broad focus

on positive outcomes of retirement migration and the lifestyles undertaken as part of an active retirement in Spain. However, in recent years there has been growing evidence of return migration from Spain, especially among British retirees (Huete, Mantecón, & Estévez, 2013). Return movements have been linked to the economic crisis, rising costs of living and exchange rate fluctuations which can have a massive impact on those receiving their income (pension) from the UK (Huete, Mantecón, & Estévez, 2013). However, return migration remains under-researched, with little being known about the extent of return migration or conditions under which it occurs.

One of the main objectives of this research is to quantify the return migration of British retirees from Spain. Although there is not enough academic literature to start a discussion, our results can be compared to some of the previous research in the field of retirement migration. One of the most important outcomes from our survey is that 28.7% of the sample stated that they intend to return to the UK in the next few years. This is the highest return intention score when compared with previous papers (Warnes et al., 1999; O'Reilly, 2000; Huete, 2009). Our survey highlighted a number of factors that may influence a decision to return including being unable to run a home.

The latest data about return migration collected from INE in 2013 indicates a change in the paradigm, as an increase of 190% in registered returns have been recorded. Moreover, the latest *Padrón* data points to the fact that 35,475 Britons over 55 years have disappeared from the registers in 2014, that is, a net loss of 18%, with most returning to the UK. This is likely to impact on the provision of welfare services in both Spain and the UK, especially because of



the old age profile of the returnees and their likely high needs in terms of health, care and financial support – something the British welfare state needs to respond to.

The indicator of net migration clearly shows that we are facing a paradigm change. Whilst the populations of older British people in Spain are still increasing rather than decreasing, this is at a much slower rate than in previous years. As Huete et al. (2013) suggested, the trend is changing and from now on we may begin to notice more exits than entries. It must also be considered that older migrants who arrived in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century are now, 15 years later, reaching the average age of returning, around 65 to 68 years old. From 2008 to 2013 our data indicates that 10.09% of registered British citizens in Spain over the age of 55 years have returned to the United Kingdom. This is a minimum of 4,339 returnees to the UK with an additional 15,961 to an unknown destination, of which many will have returned to the UK. In addition to this are the returnees who chose not to register in Spain, therefore making these conservative estimations only. Our data also indicates that over a third of returnees are over the age of 70 and are therefore likely to need access to health, care and other welfare services.

Moreover, it has been shown that individual issues are important factors in return intentions, especially being unable to run a home. Some of the structural variables are near to zero, especially those related with controls, health, corruption and xenophobia. That is suggesting high intentions of returning, although the main stream would be staying in Spain. These events, and the rising of the average age on the British community in Spain could unleash

return flows even bigger than those that are already happening now. In this case, both the United Kingdom and Spain would have to face some difficulties. The United Kingdom, because it would have to readmit their citizens into the welfare and healthcare system. These new users may have a higher average age, health complications and/or lack of autonomy, which would cause a greater disbursement for the welfare system. Moreover, the need for Habitual Residence Test could deteriorate the treatment for those who have to pass through these proofs. For Spain, the main problem is to assure a safe exit from the country, which in some cases could be assumed by the local councils or British charities, but also to face the loss of population. As long as the local budgets and some essential services are set from the amount of inhabitants, some towns could face loses in both of them. Moreover, some private services and businesses, mostly run and oriented to British citizens would have to downsize or even close due to the loss of population.

This study begins to fill a gap in research on return migration by presenting data on the number of returnees, as well as some of the return indicators. However more research on return migration is needed, especially among older lifestyle migrants, including a qualitative approach that explores, motivations, problems and experiences of return. There also remain gaps in Spanish statistical data regarding migration indicators including on the 15,961 British migrants who moved to unknown destinations. Finally, more research among those people who effectively return to the UK is needed in order to define better the reasons for their return and explore the re-integration.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Padrón* information can be reached in the website of the INE <http://www.ine.es/jaxi/menu.do?type=pcaxis&path=%2Ft20%2Fe245&file=inebase&L=0>

<sup>2</sup> The difference between Alicante and Málaga is not only based on the amount of returns over the arrivals, it is also a difference on unregistered variations, much more habitual in Málaga.

<sup>3</sup> The dependent variable is a combination of four different questions dealing with return intentions where 41.2% of the sample said they will never return; 44.01 said it depends and 14.17% assured their intention is to return in the future.

<sup>4</sup> T Tests for independent samples results (table 7): worse health (T= -2.134; fd= 215; sig= 0.034); Income decline (T= -4.536; fd=215; sig=0.000); Unable to shop (T=-3.531; fd= 215; sig= 0.001); give up car (T= -9.035; fd= 215; sig= 0.000); Unable to run home (T= -5.565; fd=215; sig=0.000); Close friends move (T= -10.599; df=215; sig=0.000); Improved health (T= -8.306; df=215; sig= 0.000); Lottery win (T= -2.288; df=215; sig=0.023) and the sum of nine events (T=-5.547; df=215; sig=0.000).