



# TOURISM AND SEASONAL RETIREMENT MIGRATION

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**Abstract:** This paper suggests that the investigation of tourism-induced seasonal retirement migration can shed new light on issues of anti-tourism, social distinction, and authenticity. Interviews conducted with Swedish retirees, spending their summers in Sweden and their winters in Spain, showed that anti-tourism may involve distinctions from devalued forms of tourism, and also distinctions based on different social roles and positions. The respondents attempted to create a social space for themselves between, on the one hand, tourists and tourism, and on the other hand, the Spanish, Spanishness, and norms of integration. These attempts also produced constructions of authenticity and normality, which challenge traditional conceptions within tourism research. **Keywords:** retirement migration, anti-tourism, social categorization, social distinction, authenticity. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

**Résumé:** Le tourisme et la migration saisonnière des retraités. Cet article suggère que l'investigation de la migration saisonnière des retraités liée au tourisme peut jeter un jour nouveau sur les questions de l'anti-tourisme, de la différence sociale et de l'authenticité. Des interviews menés auprès des retraités suédois qui passent l'été en Suède et l'hiver en Espagne ont montré que l'anti-tourisme peut être lié aux différences associées à des formes dévaluées du tourisme et aussi aux différences basées sur les rôles et les conditions sociaux. Les personnes sondées avaient essayé de se créer un espace social entre les touristes et le tourisme d'un côté et les Espagnols, la vie espagnole et les normes de l'intégration de l'autre. Leurs efforts ont produit des constructions d'authenticité et de normalité qui mettent en question les conceptions traditionnelles de la recherche dans le tourisme. **Mots-clés:** migration des retraités, anti-tourisme, catégorisation sociale, différence sociale, authenticité. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

In today's world, people sometimes move around in ways that question traditional identifications and categorizations based on, for example, tourists and tourism. As Williams and Hall (2000:20) point out, research has paid little attention to "the gray zone of the complex forms of mobility which lie on a continuum between permanent migration and tourism", although these practices may be of great interest for tourism analysis as well as for social science more generally.

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This paper investigates the experiences, self-perceptions, and distinctive strategies of a group of people pursuing one such form of mobility—Swedish retirees spending their summer seasons in Sweden and their winters in Spain.

This case of tourism-induced seasonal retirement migration evokes several topical issues. Retirement migration to southern Europe, and to Spain in particular, is, to a large extent, the result of mass tourism and involves a range of economic, sociocultural, and demographic considerations (Barke and France 1996; King, Warnes and Williams 1998; Rodríguez, Fernández-Mayoralas and Rojo 1998). On the micro level, the experiences of the retirees highlight issues of social categorization and self-identification, which refer, in important ways, to tourism. These latter issues will be the focus of this paper.

In spite of the magnitude of tourist flows and the resulting cultural and economic influences in contemporary society, both tourism and tourists are often accompanied by ambivalence, disparagement, and even hostility. “Anti-tourism” is widespread within social science as well as among the general public, with conceptions of tourism ranging from the trivial and artificial to the vulgar or barbarian, and with common stereotypes depicting the industry as exploiting and destroying local cultures, providing but superficial experiences of “sun, sea, and sand” (Crick 1989; Jacobsen 2000). Two interrelated explanations for anti-tourist attitudes and practices are often suggested—one concerns social distinction, the other authenticity.

The first explanation holds that anti-tourism reflects hierarchies within tourism and strategies of social distinction (Jacobsen 2000:287; Munt 1994). Arguments along these lines understand tourism in terms of consumption, as a way of acquiring or maintaining “cultural capital” in order to achieve social distinction (Bourdieu 1984). People strive to perform (or consume) those kinds of tourism that are relatively highly valued, while dissociating themselves from socially and culturally devalued tourist activities and orientations. Munt (1994) suggests that with increasing economic resources and improved facilities for long-distance journeys, tourism has become a critical component of the “classificatory struggles” in contemporary Western society, especially among the middle classes. This first explanation suggests that anti-tourists do not necessarily despise tourism in general, but certain forms of it, notably mass tourism. Yet, the fact that tourism is often produced for and consumed by the masses does not seem to entirely explain the persistence of anti-tourist sentiments. In order to understand what makes tourism such an efficient vehicle for social distinction, the second explanation—authenticity and rupture with normality—should also be considered.

Common definitions of tourism emphasize the distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary (or nonordinary). The temporary escape from everyday life, with activities, locations, settings, and a “gaze” contrasting with normality, is crucial to the tourist experience (Crick 1989:332; Urry 1990:2–3). Yet, the search for the extraordinary brings along the paradox of authenticity, widely discussed within the field. MacCannell (1976) suggests that the essence of tourism is the

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