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## Practices in-between: Norwegian long-term visitors in Mediterranean Spain

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### ABSTRACT

During initial ethnographic fieldwork among Norwegian long-term visitors in the province of Alicante in Spain, these visitors expressed concern about the manner in which they were portrayed in the Norwegian news media, in contrast to their own images as holidaymakers. This problem is partly epistemological, since 'long-term visitors' were uncertain about their status and role. For instance, on sightseeing tours, sports events or hiking trips, they were tourists. At other times, for instance, when dealing with local authorities, they saw themselves as different from pure tourists. The Norwegian long-termers stated that their stay in Spain was far more multifaceted than what had been portrayed in the media, that they participated in cultural and social activities, and that they had many points of contact with Spanish society. The Norwegian visitors wondered how a more accurate and multi-vocal image of holidaymakers and long-termers could be represented. The concepts of local knowledge, adaptation and discourse will be used here to problematise this timely topic in tourism research on roles and images. Developing a more comprehensive view of long-term visitors will focus not only on their own situation, but also on their relations with other visitors, the host population, and Spanish authorities.

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## Introduction

Empirical studies indicate that large international flows in different settings have blurred the distinctions among tourists, sojourners, amenity migrants and foreigners (Jacobsen, Selstad, & Nogués-Pedregal, 2009). Consequently, many people who temporarily relocate internationally may be seen as more than tourists but less than immigrants (Lauring, Selmer, & Jacobsen, 2014; Nash, 1970). Studies of tourism and international leisure travel thus run a constant risk of stereotyping their subject due to the frequent use of simplified images both by people involved in travel activities as well as the media reporting on them (Pi-Sunyer, 1989; Selstad, 2012). Many of these simplifications are directed at the role of the tourist, and at its imagined forms in collective representations as presented in daily practices. This new discursive situation resembles the Moebius strand of free association (Nogués-Pedregal, 2007). In fact, long-term visitors to a foreign country may carry all of

these roles at the same time. This article argues the need for more complex and nuanced analyses of the adaptation of long-term visitors both as residents and tourists, based on empirical case material from Norwegian nationals with long-term stays in Costa Blanca, Spain.

The socio-anthropological study of long-term visitors, known in the academic literature as 'residential tourists' and 'lifestyle migrants', has long been a research topic (Aledo, Jacobsen, & Selstad, 2012; Aubert, 1969; Casado-Diaz, 1999; Mantecón & Huete, 2011; Mazon, 2006; O'Reilly, 2000; Williams, King, & Warnes, 2004). One of the main points of discussion is how long-term visitors are discursively and practically constructed as having a role 'in-between' the ephemerality of tourists and the permanence of residents (Haug, Dann, & Mehmetoglu, 2007, p. 217). During ethnographic fieldwork in Costa Blanca, many long-term visitors expressed concern about the manner in which they were portrayed in the Norwegian news media. Informants were eager to show that their stay in Spain was far more nuanced and dialogical than portrayed. They emphasised that they engage both in touristic leisure activities and in everyday household duties and obligations. Most of them maintain relations with their home social space by means of regular flights, mobile phones, social media and meetings with compatriots, while quite a few also have Spanish friends and acquaintances. In different and active ways, they adapt to being in-between tourists and long-term residents. Similar concerns about misrepresentations have been reported for Swedish 'retirement migrants' in Spain (Gustafson, 2001, p. 908).

This great concern with painting a more accurate picture of their situation in Spain appears in the ethnographic material here in a variety of ways. A stereotypical image of the visitors is of estranged tourists experiencing 'pseudo-events' (Boorstin, 1961). Such depictions relate to problems of self-identification among Norwegian residents, since they did not know how to label their status and define their role as non-Spaniards against the usual discourse fostered by the news media and quotidian language. In some instances, they saw themselves neither as tourists nor as residents, while other renderings perceived them as both (Gustafson, 2002; Helset, Lauvli, & Sandlie, 2004). The situation of long-term visitors becomes part of a wider discussion about the relationship among tourism, residence, and migration. More composite approaches are necessary to describe the complex and changing situation of long-term visitors in the interstitial space between tourism and migration (Gustafson & Cardozo, 2017; Huete, 2008).

The ethnographic research conducted for this study consisted of longitudinal short-term fieldwork conducted between 2007 and 2017, mainly in October and November but also in March, April, and May. The research methods combine qualitative and quantitative techniques and include participant observation as well as informal and formal interviews. In addition, printed information in Spain, local and national Norwegian media, and internet sources were compiled, and photographs taken. All information was anonymised, since the respondents were not asked their name, address or other identifying characteristics. Participant observation and interviews were conducted by the first author in outdoor cafes, restaurants, hotels, a compatriot club and an airport. Of 33 partially structured interviews lasting more than 30 minutes, 14 were with women and 26 with men, including seven couples, ranging in age from 38 to 78. In addition, numerous shorter interviews and conversations were held with Norwegian people from all walks of life, a few Spaniards and people from other countries. The risk of gender bias by the male interviewer

was ameliorated by paying special attention to the situation of women, especially those who were single, since this was represented as a difficult situation by many others, notably by couples. Still, the study has some limitations as most informants were Norwegian pensioners. The research is part of a collaborative effort between scholars in Norway and Spain who are studying Norwegian long-term visitors in Costa Blanca.

The following pages will present material on how Norwegians with long-term stays in Spain adapt to social ambiguity through their daily practices in different social settings. This will include a discussion of how simplistic stereotypes of them in the Norwegian news media and in other contexts, bring a discursive contrast to the complexity and variability of their lives and practices in Spain.

### ***The setting in Costa Blanca, Spain***

Norwegian holidaymaking in Spain has a long tradition and has grown with the development of package tourism from the 1960s. After 1980, large areas along the Mediterranean coast were opened for international and domestic holiday home developments, becoming core areas for long-term visitors or 'residential tourists' (Barke, Towner, & Newton, 1996). By 2000, housing developments for residential tourists had become huge.

Most of the ethnographic fieldwork for this study was carried out in the northern part of Costa Blanca, in the towns of l'Alfàs del Pi and l'Albir, both in the municipality of l'Alfàs del Pi. This was supplemented with a few visits to the neighbouring towns of Benidorm and Altea, all located in the Spanish province of Alicante. The municipality l'Alfàs del Pi has roughly 20,000 inhabitants and covers 18.8 square kilometres (Carnicer, 1991, p. 37). The old main town in the municipality l'Alfàs del Pi lies three kilometres inland, while the new coastal town of l'Albir and much of the surrounding orchards and farm land were developed as residential tourism urbanisations from 1975 onwards. Today, international residents here outnumber the Spanish population, though it is difficult to obtain precise figures of foreign nationals in the municipality of l'Alfàs.

Informants estimated that there were 10,000 to 20,000 Norwegians on long-term stay in Costa Blanca each year. In the municipality of l'Alfàs del Pi, 6000 to 7000 long-term winter season visitors were estimated. One problem with the figures for long-term visitors is that foreign arrivals do not always register with the Spanish authorities if they own housing or reside locally, so that official figures are incomplete (Helset et al., 2004).

Norwegian entrepreneurs participated in many of the early residential tourism projects in l'Alfàs. The main village of l'Alfàs del Pi is very old and has a complex history little known to most Norwegian informants. Their narrative starting point was the Urbanización Escandinavia located in an area 'discovered' by a North Norwegian sailor in the 1960s, who was soon followed by compatriots and other Scandinavians who gave it its name. Another inland urbanización involved Norwegian and Spanish builders in 1978 and was marked by the establishment of a health facility for Norwegians with rheumatic ailments. Similar health resorts were set up elsewhere along the Spanish Mediterranean littoral and it is one of the main reasons for retirement tourism in Spain (Hurtado Garcia, 2013).

The next stage was the development for residential tourism purposes of the coastal area named l'Albir, mainly after 1990. Interestingly, knowledgeable informants disagreed on when the seashore became a destination for holidaymakers and second home owners. One long-time resident claimed that, except for a few old houses, everything in l'Albir, the

coastal area, was built after 1999. Others placed its beginning closer to 1990. Such discrepancies may be described as a part of long-term visitors' 'local knowledge' or social capital (Bourdieu, 1990; Geertz, 1983). Of special prominence was a Norwegian development called *Alfaz del Sol* or *Solfylket*, built above *l'Alfàs del Pi* in 2005. Here, the local Norwegian club, *Den Norske Klubben Costa Blanca*, was established and became a popular spot for many long-termers. In 2015, the club moved to a less conspicuous location. Residential development was soon followed by the establishment of Norwegian institutions in *l'Alfàs*: health resorts for people with rheumatism and other ailments, church, school and medical facilities, and professional services such as dental clinics.

The terrain encompassing the municipality of *l'Alfàs del Pi* ranges from the nearby hilltop town of *Altea* that has both a traditional and a slightly bohemian character, to the townships *l'Alfàs del Pi*, *l'Albir* and several other urbanizaciones with a varying composition of Spaniards and non-Spaniard home owners and other long-term visitors. The composition of the Norwegian population is similarly varied. There is a significant proportion of younger families and students, employed at Norwegian health facilities and in professions catering to long-termers. Quite a few long-term visitors were older people living on retirement and disability pensions. Some urbanizaciones, such as the one where a Norwegian school (*Den Norske Skolen*) is located, had younger families, while other urban developments near *l'Alfàs* and in *l'Albir* were inhabited mostly by retirees. A survey conducted in 2007 indicated that nearly three-quarters of the Norwegian long-term visitors here owned their dwellings (Jacobsen et al., 2009). In most instances, relocations to Spain have been highly seasonal, with many people leaving Norway each fall and staying in Spain until spring. A large proportion would go to Norway for Christmas and New Year celebrations. The Norwegian long-termers were generally described by interviewees as resourceful and wealthy by Spanish standards. Still, many informants pointed out that people from all walks of life were present, from healthy well-to-do people to those with economic, social and health issues.

Despite their socio-economic and motivational heterogeneity, all informants were greatly concerned with demonstrating that they were 'ordinary people'. This was reflected in how they referred to themselves, and the many discussions about being tourists or residents, for which the official Spanish term is *residentes extranjeros* or 'foreign residents'. Informants used terms of self-reference such as 'resident', 'long-term tourist', and 'migratory bird', a variety and ambiguity of references also found in other studies of Scandinavian populations in Spain (Gustafson, 2001). Indeed, ethnographic accounts show that attempts at classifying these movements as 'lifestyle migration' (O'Reilly, 2000) or 'international retirement migration' (Haug et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2004) run the risk of misjudging people's reasons for relocations. A difficulty with such a classification is that Norwegian residents do not represent themselves as immigrants, and describe their stay as seasonal (Strøm, 1998). It must also be mentioned that older visitors tended to resent the implication that they are elderly and infirm, since they live active and full lives (Helset et al., 2004). One implication of this is that any categorisation such as retirement migration should be made with qualifications. More particularly, long-term visitors in *Costa Blanca* often found themselves in an ambiguous social position as neither tourist nor resident. They handled this ambiguity in different ways. Their 'in-betweenness' lay at the core of some of the challenges that they faced, but also became central to their adaptation

to the locals and the tourism settings in Spain. The simplistic view that roles have to be mutually exclusive did not hold; theirs remained fluid.

### ***Practices in-between***

A first line of ethnographic inquiry was to ask if the respondents, from an emic perspective, considered themselves 'residents' or 'tourists'. Informants would point out that being a tourist could have several meanings, but so did being a resident. Reflective respondents would note the difficulty of defining who is a tourist; indeed, this has long been a basic challenge in tourism studies (Cohen, 1974). This is also reflected in the plethora of official terms used within the Spanish hospitality sector, such as welfare state tourism, mass tourism, health tourism, long-term tourism, holiday visits, and residential tourism, all of which relate to different visitor roles and performances (O'Reilly, 2000) and, somehow, also to ideological constructions (Mantecón, 2017). Furthermore, there is a constant segmentation of the tourism market designed to respond to the emergence of hybrid consumption patterns and, consequently, to hybrid tourists (Boztug, Babakhani, Laesser, & Dolnicar, 2015; Huete & Mantecón, 2012). This diversity has become associated with various views on tourism development and poly-residentiality, including stereotypes (Selstad, 2012).

Nonetheless, many informants had no problems discussing whether they were tourists or residents. A typical first response was that they were not tourists, since they lived in Spain on a long-term or permanent basis. Next, on reflection, some informants would say they were not residents either, since their main domicile was in Norway. On several occasions, this would lead to a compromise where people would say they were tourists in some respects and residents in others. This could generate lengthy discussions, whether one was resident in Norway or in Spain, a tourist or an immigrant, and what their relationship was to Spanish society. A few informants described themselves as 'nomads', living in more than one location. An interesting research issue was that no respondent rejected either role expectation out of hand except noting that 'immigrant' had a strong connotation of being an economic refugee that did not fit them. Also, most interviewees agreed that they could not call themselves Spanish, even after decades of living in Spain and having learned the language – but the different roles were not dismissed.

One respondent claimed that Norwegians in Spain are 'also' tourists, because they engage in many tourist activities. This was especially true of the Norwegian club that arranges frequent sightseeing trips and excursions. While most of the sightseeing trips were intended for pensioners, younger people also went on such trips. One older man was quite insistent that Norwegian residents were 'not tourists', but then he hesitated and thought that someone staying less than three months could be 'called a tourist'. Apparently, he chose this period of time because most of his friends stayed longer, for half a year or more. Pondering a little, he added that 'people do the same things that tourists do', taking walks and 'activities of different kinds' (cf. Lengkeek, 2000). A leading person at the Norwegian club misconstrued the question of being a tourist, using the term 'Norwegians in Spain', meaning that people who reside in Spain have their sense of belonging and cultural identity in Norway. He reflected that people on long-term visits 'probably consider themselves different from other tourists'. He then added that

long-term visitors did 'many of the same things that tourists do', though activities were more organised, like hobby groups at the compatriot club.

Incidentally, ethnographic observation revealed an intriguing contradiction. The tourist is fleeing modern life and stress, seeking meaning in what is experienced as authentic (Wang, 2000). However, in the extensive field notes the words 'authentic', 'real' and 'genuine' appear only 12 times, and then only four in reference to Spanish culture, otherwise referring to coffee, pizza, tourism places and research.

One peculiarity of long-term residents was that they participated in many activities. Unlike tourists who do not have time to become deeply involved in anything, the residents could immerse themselves in hobbies and activities. Several interviewees mentioned the extended social network of residents. One supposed difference between long-term residents and ordinary holidaymakers was that the former enjoyed a 'circle of friends' or acquaintances in Spain who they met regularly. 'A tourist could make friends' on a journey, but then go home and never see them again, while long-term visitors would keep in touch with acquaintances both in Spain and in Norway, a regular social network. One Norwegian businessman thought the residential visitors were not 'ordinary' tourists but 'very resourceful travellers'. He stressed that Norwegians in Spain should not be portrayed as misfits travelling to Syden ('The South'), at the expense of the Norwegian government social services, with reference to the debate over unflattering news coverage (cf. Loodtz, 2002).

The more reflective respondents pointed to obvious differences between long-term and regular sojourners, such as preparing for a longer stay, obtaining health care, and other concerns. The long-term residents had 'more to do, a varied existence', such as doing 'practical, daily tasks'. At the same time, they thought that persons with long stays 'also can be tourists'. Some respondents, usually younger ones, took a contrarian perspective, noting that Norwegians who live in Spain or 'most of them' would not be reckoned as locals or permanent residents. Moreover, they were unsure if persons with long stays were 'actual' tourists, assuming that a tourist is someone who 'travels through or visits a place', not staying permanently. The question of being a resident usually led to considerations of complicated legal matters such as pension rights and taxation. While this was not an interview question, several interviewees who commented on this were vague about stipulations. Some persons thought that one only had to stay three months in Norway to receive pension and welfare benefits, though the normative rules say six months (Helset et al., 2004). Others thought it was not necessary to register permanent residence in Spain, since this would only create bureaucratic difficulties. These were some of the issues that made the question of resident status more complicated than that of being a tourist or not, at least for younger informants.

The notion of chronotope, a connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships, seems an appropriate scaffold to map out social complexity in Mediterranean multinational tourism contexts as a time-space structure giving order and sense to social ambiguities and disorders in different narratives (Nogués-Pedregal, 2015). In this sense all the ethnographic accounts show that the use of different terms to categorise social practices are contextual. Indeed, some informants stressed their ability to switch roles: a person can be a resident and then 'become more of a tourist when going on excursions'. The expression 'role distance' has been used to describe people who are attached or committed to a role but wish to distance themselves from its accompanying identity

(Goffman, 1961). Roles apparently contest some people's sense of identity and individuality and role distance may then be a means of upholding a feeling that there is an 'I' who is dissimilar from other occupants and players of a role (Jacobsen, 2000; Manning, 1992).

Long-term visitors usually enter a tourist role for 'recreation' or sightseeing. In some situations or settings, short-term holidaymakers were quite visible, such as leisure travellers walking in a group with backpacks and summer clothes. But once sitting at an outdoor café or taking pictures, anybody could be a tourist and/or labelled and treated as such, even the anthropologist (Nogués-Pedregal, 2012, pp. 62–64). In some situations, the tourist role became a safety valve for residents. In other situations became too stressful, such as interaction with Spanish professionals, a person with a long stay could withdraw to the main street and be a 'tourist', as may an immigrant crossing borders (Cabot & Lenz, 2012). This hints at the common occurrence of role play in tourism (Wang, 1996). Then there were people who distanced themselves both from the residential visitor character and the short-term tourist role, such as when protecting their privacy by refusing to sit with their compatriots. A summary statement could be that seasonal travel to Spain was an intermediate phenomenon 'between tourism and migration', with many crossing points (Haug et al., 2007, p. 217).

That Norwegians on lengthy stays in Spain did not clearly dissociate themselves from what short-term tourists do was partly reflected in their motives for going. These motives closely paralleled those found in visitor surveys (Foss, 2002; Jacobsen et al., 2009). The warm and dry climate in l'Alfàs del Pi was consistently mentioned as a main reason for long-term stays; the contrasting push factor was Norway's cold and wet weather. It was emphasised that l'Alfàs, shielded by mountains and facing the Mediterranean, had a particularly pleasant climate that was 'healthful' for elderly Norwegians. In turn, periods of wet and cold weather on Costa Blanca immediately became a topic of complaint around the café tables, people taking comfort in the relative brevity of these episodes. Knowing when there might be rain or cold spells was an important aspect of local knowledge among the long-termers. Associated with the climate were health motives, with almost everyone saying their health improved under the Spanish sun. A third frequently mentioned motive was social contact, that one could meet family, friends and acquaintances in this leisuerscape or holiday setting (Jacobsen & Nogués-Pedregal, 2017). Cultural attractions and activities were often noted, along with a theme of romance; though cultural information also became a sort of 'cultural capital' for residents to show they were knowledgeable, without necessarily attending events. In an airport survey in 2007, more than 90% cited climate as an important reason for going to Spain; others were more social life, health reasons, outdoor activities, and lower cost of living (Jacobsen et al., 2009).

The counterpart of time is space. In the collective imaginary presented of long-termers are those of a segregated existence, using words such as 'ghetto', 'enclave', 'expat community', 'foreign colony', ever since Mario Gaviria made the first analysis on foreigners in Alicante and started talking of 'parallel societies' (1976). Most of these terms, however, cannot be readily applied to long-timers in the Costa Blanca. For instance, the spatial distribution does not ease the formation of socio-spatial enclaves, and the idea of diaspora is not present for the residents who do not long for their native land. Most of the Norwegian long-termers who were interviewed lived in mixed residential neighbourhoods that included Spanish citizens and other nationalities; a few lived in temporary residences

such as camping grounds. It is noteworthy that informants hardly mentioned any 'segregative' term to refer to the dwelling area; instead they used neutral terms such as 'living area' or purely descriptive ones such as an urbanización with Norwegian residents. The only term that could portray the idea of segregation was 'Norwegian colony'; even this term was used as a vague reference to people living in the local area and lacking any sense of territoriality. Territorial terms such as 'ghetto' are used mainly in the news media (Loodtz, 2002). In response to this, an informant replied that 'Norwegians in l'Alfàs del Pi' were 'not isolated loners or hillbillies' but 'urban' and 'international' persons who associated with other nationalities. A word that presents itself is 'transnationalism', closely linked with 'cosmopolitanism' and 'cross-nationalism' (Gustafson, 2008). Such etic categories become problematic, because informants never used these words, though they might speak of 'international' contacts. The suggestion is to look more closely at people's adaptation, without prematurely settling on a label or analytical category. The ethnography of the present study shows that Norwegian long-termers have quite distinct adaptations down to the individual level, where the most transnational person is not necessarily the most 'integrated'. How to cope depends on individual strengths and resources – as pointed out by informants.

One issue in many parts of the world with residential tourism is the development of 'gated communities' and resorts for affluent people demanding security. A related issue is the growth of all-inclusive hotels (Dann, 2000). In l'Alfàs there are at least two such hotels, and one Norwegian urbanización resembling a gated community. But observations in the Costa Blanca show that gated communities here are not exclusively for foreign residents and do not differ from other dwelling blocks with locked gates. In l'Alfàs many properties were surrounded by high walls and solid gates.

One assumption during the fieldwork for this study was that many persons would express a strong attachment to their native country, which was only partly confirmed (Haug et al., 2007). When Norwegians spoke of 'home', they often meant Norway. At the same time such appellations were contextual, 'going home' could also refer to their dwelling in l'Alfàs. People might say that 'home' was in Norway, but this could be modified so that they were a little at home in both Norway and Spain. There were many positive statements about Norway, such as 'it was nice to get a visit from Norwegians'; VFR tourism, visiting friends and relatives, is one of the distinguishing roles among long-term visitors (Holloway & Humphreys, 2012). A special case concerned the purchase of Norwegian newspapers sold at several Norwegian cafés and other places. Rather than viewing this as a strong attachment to the home country, the newspaper served as a social symbol; a man explained that if he saw someone with the paper on their café table, this was a signal for comments and contact. The ambiguous attachment to nationality was reflected in a local magazine asking '5 on the street' where they spent the summer, and what they missed; all were older persons who said they had been 'home' in Norway, and all except one mentioned missing the warmth in Spain. The attachment to the home country is basic, but it does not override the varied personal attachments that people have while on Costa Blanca.

Compatriot clubs and national associations are often indicated as popular meeting places for people of the same nationality; such associations are found all along the Spanish Mediterranean where 'residential tourists' are concentrated (Haug et al., 2007; O'Reilly, 2000). This was also the case in l'Alfàs, where the Norwegian club was located

outside the main village. The association boasted a thousand members, though perhaps closer to 800 after trouble with the Spanish food inspection. It reportedly hosted an average of ten events every week, each event averaging 40 attendees. While these figures may not be reliable, they indicate the level of club attendance, boosted by a majority of callers simply coming for the coffee and waffles, reading the papers and socialising. The number and variety of activities organised at the club was impressive, and ranged from visits to concerts, and exhibitions, to study groups in art, Spanish history, language and culture, exercise groups and a host of others. The club was founded in the 1970s, and had been in a modern patio location since 2005; associated with it were the café, meeting rooms, and other service facilities. However, an inspection by Spanish authorities forced the café and related services to close temporarily in 2009-2010 (Qué Pasa, 2010). Later, the club moved to a location away from Norwegian residences.

Elderly residents at the nearby Norwegian urbanización made almost daily visits to the Norwegian club, where they would sit and chat on the patio. Despite its apparent popularity, it became clear during research that many of the Norwegian long-termers never went to the club; four or five informants had not even heard of it. This is significant, because it contradicts a view that the compatriot club was important to Norwegians; the news media depicted it as exclusionary and segregated. The leaders of the club and most of the Norwegian residents protested against this image. It seems relevant to view the conflicts and negative images surrounding the club as part of the ambiguity and discussions over the status of long-termers as tourists and residents, where the club by catering almost exclusively to Norwegians fostered both residence and a sense of foreignness.

The majority of Norwegians interviewed emphasised that they were not isolated, and that they took part in many activities not only with their compatriots but also with locals and international contacts. Activities could be touristic, such as going on sightseeing to scenic villages, or a mixture of tourism and local activities, such as visiting weekly district markets in l'Alfàs del Pi and l'Albir. Most events had an everyday feel, such as visiting the beach, going for walks, and going out to bars and restaurants. People participated in group activities, like boccia or pétanque that had both local and international appeal. Incidentally, very few informants played golf, usually considered popular with long-termers in the Costa Blanca. A few played tennis or went sailing, activities that most Norwegians considered special. Sunbathing was popular, but usually near the residence rather than at the beach (Haug et al., 2007). Swimming and sunbathing were not frowned upon, contrary to another study of long-termers (Gustafson, 2001).

### ***Divergent views of Norwegian long-term residents***

In our early encounters with Norwegians residing in Spain, we had expected that their status as tourists or residents would be a sensitive issue. However, it was striking that this topic was viewed with interest by informants met during the first fieldwork period, a circle of older Norwegians in a Scandinavian restaurant. They used the opportunity to complain about 'all the wrong things' that the news media in Norway was reporting about Norwegian long-termers. They were most offended by TV reporters who made a programme portraying Norwegians in l'Alfàs as right-wing and isolationist. The informants' claim was that this was a biased image; that they were just like everyone else, participated in many activities, had contact with other nationals, and appreciated Spanish culture. The

media discourse on tourism can only be hinted at here, and has a background in earlier criticism of mass tourism in Spain; this was turned against long-termers when an elderly celebrity in 2002 denounced what she called a Norwegian 'ghetto'. This comment was picked up by the media as 'Norwegians lumping together in separate ghettos' (Loodtz, 2002). The critical focus was the celebration of the Norwegian national day (May 17) that was seen as a display of nationalism; in many ways this became an internal Norwegian discourse, where it became important for residents to show that local authorities supported their festivities. As part of this internal discourse, those involved try to come to terms with the contrast between a large and visible presence of residential tourists, and the varied efforts of individual long-termers to settle in and adapt to their Spanish surroundings. This contrast is interestingly reflected in the media, where the problems of living in Spain are sometimes noted. On a general level, the widespread dissatisfaction of residents with media images can be linked to the prevalence of tourism stereotypes, not least stereotypes about the tourist role (Selstad, 2012).

By contrast, informants shared personal narratives that emphasised the positive aspects of their life on Costa Blanca. Indeed, people would speak enthusiastically about their travel careers of relocating to Spain. Most had a long history of visiting Spain and 'The South'. One example is a man born in 1931 who had a multifaceted background as sailor, farmer, teacher and entrepreneur in Western Norway. While sailing around Latin America he learned to speak some Spanish, and as he grew older he came to Spain as a holidaymaker. In the 1980s he started living on Costa Blanca, eventually leaving his farm and small company to his grown children. He had lived permanently in a Spanish residential area in La Vila Joiosa since the 1990s, where he was on close terms with a young Spanish family next door. At the same time, he visited the Klubben every two weeks for coffee and a chat, and he visited acquaintances each week, including a friend in the Urbanización Escandinavia, walking the two kilometres. He candidly said that he had become accustomed to living in Spain, liked the lifestyle, the sea, the neighbours, visiting markets and walking around. At the same time, he remained in touch with his Norwegian family and friends. In some ways, he has the best of the two social worlds, or has simply learned to associate both with Spaniards and Norwegians.

Another example is a woman born in 1932. She explained that she had a daughter and family in the north of Norway but because of her aching joints and poor health she had decided to move to Spain. In previous years, she had brought her young daughter with her on package tours, but once the daughter grew up and left home the mother decided to settle in Spain permanently. This was made possible by a disability pension and help from other Norwegians to find a flat. She visited the Klubben almost daily, where her friends were, and had settled into the safe surroundings there. As a general observation, elderly long-termers had visited the area before and then been encouraged to buy or rent a dwelling by real estate agents and their Norwegian contacts or friends. Most persons with long stays would have had a general career as holidaymakers, both in Norway and on package tours, before coming to spend longer periods in Spain. An airport survey of long-termers revealed that four out of five had previously visited Costa Blanca and l'Alfàs (Jacobsen et al., 2009, p. 194). In some ways their careers influenced their residential choices; for instance, campers chose to live on camping sites. A large segment of long-termers rented apartments near the main street in l'Albir, while others

owned apartments and houses scattered around in the urbanizaciones or in old residential areas.

Each career was a little different. One man (born 1960), who had been a successful entrepreneur in Norway, experienced personal problems before moving to l'Albir where he opened a pub. While his story may differ from those of typical pensioners and other long-termers, it helps to show the variety in people's background. In the local setting, it was almost impossible to distinguish a former entrepreneur from a newly arrived holiday-maker; most Norwegians took care to blend into the vacationscape scene. This finding is partly supported by other research, and stands in contrast to studies claiming that long-term visitors want to distinguish themselves from tourists (Haug et al., 2007; Gustafson, 2001, p. 900).

Most studies have reported that most long-termers have a positive image of Spain (Gustafson, 2001, p. 908; Haug et al., 2007, p. 217; Helset et al., 2004; Huete, 2008; Jacobsen et al., 2009). Informants spoke of life and culture in Spain as an 'enrichment', that provided an improved quality of life. This topic of the quality of life in Costa Blanca, that it was 'nice to live' there, was also used as a commentary against media images of Norwegians in Spain as people with health and social problems; on the contrary the pleasant climate was noted as a source of health improvement and an active life. There also was a generally favourable attitude to Spanish culture. Aside from theme parks and nature parks, the biggest nearby attraction was an old mountain village that was a 'must-see' to long-termers, young and old. The Norwegians liked to visit historical buildings, savour the local food and specialties, visit Spanish markets, and in general enjoyed what the country had to offer. Such positive views are a discursive contrast to media claims of isolationism. People explored their position 'in-between' being long-term visitors and holidaymakers to participate in local events.

## Conclusion

This article has described the many varying aspects of Norwegians' long-term sojourns in Costa Blanca, Spain. Among these Norwegian long-termers there were many adaptations to the host society operating at the same time with numerous variations and distinctions (cf. Casado-Diaz, 1999). These forms of engagement point to a paradox between overly simplistic views of roles and relations on the one hand, and an increasing awareness of late modern flexibility and fluidity on the other. Even more challenging, these simplified theoretical views often carry strong moral implications, such as a lament of the anomie and meaninglessness of modern life, while paying little attention to the empirical circumstances of people trying to cope with their lives on the ground. Persons with long stays in Costa Blanca may seek a structured and secure way of life while moving between shifting contexts and situations, as reflected in Norwegian respondents' views of attaching to different roles as residents and tourists.

An unresolved dilemma was that Norwegians cannot become full residents of Spain without jeopardising their status as visitors. At the same time, their role as tourists is debatable, since they already spend much of every year in Spain. Informants responded to this dilemma by defining themselves into and out of such roles as tourist and resident. In general terms, they understood their roles and statuses as contextual, perhaps more so than in formal definitions of particular roles. At an attraction, such as a theme park,

everybody could be seen as a tourist, but in downtown shopping only foreign visitors might be seen in that light. In a public office or workplace, a person would no longer be a tourist but rather an employee or a client, with the rights of a citizen. Also, a role might change within a context, such as entering an office while appearing as a holiday-maker but becoming a resident when asking about taxation laws or other issues.

The challenge would be to foster more flexible and nuanced views of particular roles. For instance, the rights and duties of holidaymakers sometimes appear vague when compared to those of immigrants and citizens, partly because the tourist role is often perceived as transient and unsettled (Cohen, 1974). Tourist obligations and rights need to be considered more carefully by practitioners and authorities. For instance, in the EU all arrivals from member nations have citizen rights, whether tourists or residents, something that is easily forgotten in a stereotypical view of tourism. The distinction between one type of person and another often runs the risk of exaggeration and stereotyping, while people constantly move between roles (Selstad, 2012). Norwegians in Spain might be leisure travellers who live full lives as residents and individuals.

A final emic perspective to be noted is Zygmunt Bauman's thoughts about 'fluid' late modernity, where tourists are viewed as detached from their surroundings while experiencing a lack or 'looseness' of social ties with local people in the places they arrive in (Franklin, 2003). Unlike the 'liquid' metaphor, demonstrating local knowledge and familiarity with *l'Alfàs del Pi* become an important marker of adaptation among long-termers. The main observation about the Norwegian long-term visitors in Costa Blanca is that there are extensive individual and social variations in how people adapt. This concerns every aspect of existence, from language use to acquaintances, while most informants have many international relationships, including Spanish contacts (Jacobsen et al., 2009). There is no clear correlation between lengths of stay or familiarity with Spain and the satisfaction with or success of individual adaptations. Many long-term visitors can try to become involved in Spanish society or to live entirely in a tourism context, while most adaptations are transitional and fall somewhere in between.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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