

# The transnational lives of Finnish retirees in Torrevieja

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## Abstract

Decades of consumerist package tourism have encouraged Northern European retirees to engage in more self-oriented, flexible travel, and some are taking advantage of seasonal migration to the Mediterranean. This has become possible because of the accelerating material and immaterial flows that have led people to view the world as getting smaller. This article interprets the phenomenon utilizing theories of the spatial turn and qualitatively examines the empirical case of Finnish retirees in Torrevieja, Spain. For the middle-class retirees, seasonal migration can offer positive economic and lifestyle incentives. Due to the flow of images and information, it is possible to construct secure and comfortable everyday lives in a transnational setting. The Finnish community in Torrevieja has grown to such a point that its members collectively represent Finnishness in community activities and on social media, thereby strengthening the community. The Finnish community in the location and online contact with relatives decrease the significance of the spatial proximity of social relations. These relatively affluent retirees consume time and space in mobile ways that undermine the material, mental, and social significance of geographical location.

*Keywords: international retirement migration, Finnish retirees, Torrevieja, time-space compression, transnational space*

## Introduction

Since the late 1960s, economic growth and rising consumerism have generated new ways of consuming time and space. A significant result of these processes was the development of mass tourism, and Spain has been a pioneer in producing tourist spaces in order to accumulate capital flows. Over the last 50 years, the Finnish population has slowly become accustomed to leisure travel. For those affluent workers and middle classes who are currently retiring, migrating to 'the South' to enjoy the better climate and cheaper cost of living has become an inviting option.

Torrevieja, a coastal city in southeastern Spain, is one location where a substantial community of Finnish retirees has developed.

The general purpose of this article is to analyse the cultural shift of growing mobility in the context of Finnish retirement migration. The theoretical perspective of this article is adopted from theorists of the spatial turn, whose main thrust is that time and space are socially produced (Harvey, 1990; Lefebvre, 1974/1991; Urry, 1995, 2007). Using qualitative data from interviews and observations, this article examines Finnish retirees' lives in the transnational city of Torrevieja. This article is structured as follows: first, I outline the development of mass tourism and international retirement migration, and detail how Finns feature in these phenomena. After presenting the current research discussion, I formulate the main theoretical concepts used in this article. I then outline my data and methods, and report my results by depicting the material basis of why Finns migrate to Torrevieja. After this, I analyse how the flow of information and images has changed thinking about migration. I then examine the social experience of everyday life in Torrevieja. I conclude this article with a discussion on how the increased mobility affects the experience of transnational spatial relations.

## From package tourism to international retirement migration

In the 1960s, the Spanish government – along with other Mediterranean countries – started to promote foreign exchange earnings and mass tourism (Bramwell, 2004a, 2004b). The early production of mass tourism was very much the result of growing consumerism and the introduction of technical innovations such as commercial airlines. In Northern Europe, rising incomes made it possible to spend more money on holidays. In order to attract Northern European tourists, travel agencies used romantic images of resorts that did not always reflect reality (Nelson, 2005; Urry, 1990). The influx of people, capital, and information revolutionized the Mediterranean coast's local cultures, economies, and physical appearance (Bramwell, 2004a; Stanek, 2014).

Finland, a small and for a long time relatively poor nation, was late in emulating the other Northern European nations' taste for Mediterranean holidays (Jokinen & Veijola, 1990). Enabled by rapid economic growth, organized package holidays grew in Finland until the recession of the 1990s but recovering by the late 1990s. Selänniemi (1996, 2001) has argued that for mainly working-class tourists, the holiday to 'the South' was the categorization for all beach locations. Finnish tourists did not require any authentic culture, only sunshine and enjoyment, therefore the trip could have been to the 'Playa del Anywhere' (see also Urry, 1995, p. 140). Since Selänniemi conducted his fieldwork in the early to mid-1990s, package tourism has become even more common and its social distinction has lost its power. In 2014, Finnish people made almost 800,000 leisure trips with an overnight stay to Spain (Statistics Finland, 2014). Beyond package tourism, leisure travel has become so common that seasonal migration to a place of sun and enjoyment has become a potential option.

In various developed countries with an ageing population and relatively high pension levels, lifestyle migration to sunnier climes for a better way of life has increased (Benson & O'Reilly,

2009; Casado-Díaz, 2006; Hayes, 2015; Ono, 2015). Following Urry (1995, p. 129), Williams, King, Warnes, and Patterson (2000) note that 'leisure-related activities cannot be separated from the social relations in which they are embedded'. For relatively affluent Northern European retirees, migration to Southern Europe is primarily motivated by a desire to live a more satisfying life, and therefore tourism experiences function as a tool in the search for an appropriate space for retirement (Haug, Dann, & Mehmetoglu, 2007; King, Warnes, & Williams, 1998; Vincente, 2001). A growing number of retirees are already enjoying life in a better climate, so visiting friends and relatives also functions as an important portal for seasonal migration (Casado-Díaz, Casado-Díaz, & Casado-Díaz, 2014).

International retirement migration has become such a significant form of the consumption of space that in some localities it has altered the socio-demographic structure by ageing it and ethnically diversifying it (Casado-Díaz, 1999). Residential tourism boosts sales of new urbanizations (suburban housing projects) and so reinforces the growth of earlier tourism developments. Population growth and local expenditure are significant income transfers from the Nordic countries to the expatriate destinations. The European Union's free movement legislation has made the transition easier, and so the well-off retirees may calculate the costs and benefits of seasonal migration. This obviously creates political pressure, not only for the Nordic countries but for the migration destinations as well. In order to compete for these profit-making subjects, Portugal has, for example, declared a ten-year tax relief on foreign private-sector retirees. In Finland, retirement migration has raised a debate in the media regarding retirees exporting potential capital out of Finland, and so the Finnish government negotiated a new agreement to tax pensions in the country of origin.

There has been some research on Finnish expatriates living in the Costa del Sol, Spain (Karisto, 2008; Könnilä, 2014; Suikki-Honkanen, 1996). Karisto (2008) argues that as a phenomenon, international retirement migration is a glimpse of the future: it will continue to increase due to the ever-accelerating process of globalization. The currently retiring generation has lived through a period of almost constant economic growth, and many have built up substantial assets. It is therefore clear that more Finnish retirees are envisioning seasonal migration. In 2013, Spain played host to the second largest number of Finnish retirees (after Sweden), with 2,497 statutory earnings-related pensions paid there; the average monthly pension was €1,834 (Finnish Centre for Pensioners, 2015, p. 109).

The city of Torrevieja on the Costa Blanca was until the 1980s a small town with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants, but due to the aggressive promotion of second-home residential tourism, the city began to enlarge (Casado-Díaz, 1999). It is now the primary home of 100,096 inhabitants, of which half (49%) are of foreign origin (Ayuntamiento de Torrevieja, 2014a). The largest foreign nationality is British (9,501), followed by Russians (5,359) and Moroccans (3,099). Finns are the twelfth largest foreign nationality, with 990 inhabitants. This number only consists of people who have applied for residency, which means their stay in Torrevieja exceeds 183 days annually. It is estimated that the actual number of Finns residing for longer periods during the winter might be twice or three times the official figures (see Kurvinen, 2014; Könnilä, 2014). Torrevieja is also relatively elderly. One quarter (24%) of the population is over sixty-five years old,

whereas the overall rate in Spain is 18 per cent (Ayuntamiento de Torrevieja, 2014b; Eurostat, 2014). The material conditions of globalization, flexibility, and relative wealth are increasing the lifestyle mobility of retirees, and changing their experience of time and space (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Casado-Díaz, Kaiser, & Warnes, 2004; Cohen, Duncan, & Thulemark, 2015).

## Theoretical framework

In the 1970s, the growth of consumerism and Western urbanization led the French social theorist, Henri Lefebvre (1974/1991), to examine the social production of space. He formulated a conception of space as socially produced in an ongoing dialectical triad of material, mental, and social elements (see also Simonsen, 2005). He saw that people's spatial practices take a material form, for example in urban reality or air transport, but these practices are guided by representations of space (e.g. travel brochures) (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 59). In other words, the way people mentally conceive of space and its intellectually determined cultural signs steers their practices. But Lefebvre (1974/1991, p. 39) also saw a social element in the action: 'space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols [...] overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects'. In these representational spaces (e.g. social gatherings and social media) people can alter manifest representations through collective appropriation. Thus, Lefebvre also considered subjects to possess power in transforming space and society, not just the capitalist relations of production. His ideas enabled a conception in which space is not just a mental or material entity; it is constantly produced in a fluid and reflexive process of people's social practices.

Lefebvre's theory has nevertheless been criticized for being too vague for empirical research (Harvey, 1990, p. 219; Schmid, 2008, pp. 42–43). Building on Lefebvre's concepts, David Harvey (1990) instead highlights the fluid nature of material and immaterial flows concerning the global and local levels of social relationships. Capital, people, information, and images travel through time and space ever faster, which makes us feel that the world is getting smaller (see also Urry, 1995). Harvey (1990, p. 240) has called this phenomenon 'time-space compression'. He sees a link here to the change from Fordist to post-Fordist production. Since the mid-1970s, the production of goods and services has been under pressure to be more flexible and responsive to meet consumers' needs. Further developing these ideas, John Urry (e.g. 1995, 2007, 2010) has argued that places too are in competition and have become an important sector of economics (see also Saarinen, 2004). In Western societies, social relations are no longer so dependent on locality due to the progression of transportation and media connections. It is not only the production of concrete products that has changed from being fixed to flexible, but also services and ways of living. Thus, the increased mobility has enabled transnational lifestyles for Western citizens, meaning that social relations cross national borders (Kivisto, 2003; Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2006).

The current social transformation of increased mobility is very much an emergent and chaotic process (Urry, 2010). The production of mass tourism was Fordist in its early stages, but now travel has become more flexible and individually oriented (Gale, 2009; Urry, 1995). Social relations in fixed spatial locations become less significant, since their connections in time-space

have also become more flexible (Larsen et al., 2006). In this article, I combine Lefebvre's idea of the production of space with Harvey's time-space compression and Urry's ideas of the increased mobility of capital, people, information, and images. Using this framework, I analyse Finnish retirees' transnational lifestyles in Torrevieja.

## Methodology

Inspired by the increased mobility and transnational spatiality of contemporary retirees, I have gathered data for this article using a multi-sited ethnographic orientation (e.g. Marcus, 1998, pp. 17–19; Marcus, 2014). My preparation for this study began in late 2014. During the winter, I started observing Finns living in Spain via the Internet. I had some help from a Finnish researcher living in Fuengirola, who advised me to head to Torrevieja, as it was not yet researched and had grown to have a significant expatriate community of Finns. I started contacting Finnish associations there and received help in informing the people living in the region of my potential research. I found volunteers to interview from the local Finnish church, the Finnish Association of Torrevieja, and relevant Facebook groups organized by Finns. In addition, some informants took me to other informants. My field trip in Spain lasted 16 days. There were also many email conversations before and after the interviews. For this study, I recorded 14 interviews, of which one was conducted with a local tourist officer, one with a Finnish church (Torrevieja) employee, and the remainder were conducted with Finnish retirees. Of these 14 interviews, 12 were conducted in Torrevieja and two in Finland. My interviews lasted up to three hours. Besides the more formal recorded interviews, I had many informal conversations with Finns in Torrevieja; I recorded these conversations in my field diary. I also held a discussion session with local Finnish retirees at the Finnish Association's clubhouse. After the fieldwork, I followed Facebook conversations and observed the marketing of Torrevieja's apartments at the *Home Abroad* trade fair in Helsinki. I transcribed the interviews and observations, and coded them by theme using NVivo. By theming the content, I developed the main categories, which make up the following sections.

To meet Geertz's (1973) demands for 'thick description', I have followed the subject's clues while being guided by the theoretical framework and my expanding awareness during the study. The field visit was quite short, and without prior knowledge of the place, it was difficult to organize many interviews per day. In addition, the siesta and relaxed daily rhythm of the Finnish retirees had an impact. I have compensated for my small sample size with observations in the field and using social media and the statistics available. Despite these problems, the data is sufficient for 'saying something of something' (Geertz, 1973, p. 453; see also Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), in this case about Finnish retirement migration to Torrevieja. In the following sections, I deal in more detail with the material, mental, and social aspects of why Finnish retirees have come to reside in Torrevieja, and how their everyday lives in the transnational space are produced.

## The material effects of the flow of people and capital

When the first Finns arrived to Torrevieja in the mid-1980s, the surrounding hills were still occupied by goats, but the construction since then has been constant. New urbanizations were

promoted aggressively to retiring Northern Europeans. The massive construction continued until the 2008 Euro crisis, which froze the market (Gonzalez Perez, 2010). Torrevieja has been a traditional second home holiday space for Madrilenians (people from Madrid). In the summer, the city's population reaches almost half a million, but at this time most of the Finns have returned to Finland. Torrevieja is an important tourist space, but in the Finnish context, it is characteristic that it is not a package tourism destination. When comparing it to the major destination for Finns in Spain – Fuengirola on the Costa del Sol – Torrevieja is more oriented to second home living. In Casado-Díaz's (1999) demographic research on Torrevieja's residential tourism, she argues that the international retirees are mainly moving to urbanizations, meaning that the city centre will depopulate in the future. Many retirees still find the city centre attractive during the winter because *[i]n the urbanizations, you don't have neighbours or help when you need it* (Man, 65 years old. Interviewed in Torrevieja 19 February 2015).

The cost of living and property prices are important factors pulling Finnish retirees to Spain. Due to the Euro crisis, the Spanish real estate market has crashed, while in Finland the prices of apartments have been relatively stable. In addition, the associated expenses of owning an apartment are much lower in Spain. My informants constantly described how bad it felt to go shopping for groceries in Finland. One informant estimated that living in Torrevieja is approximately 30 percent cheaper than in Finland. Even though the majority of Finns in Torrevieja are middle-class, they might not be that wealthy in Finland. One woman explained that she can indulge in more luxuries in Spain than would otherwise be possible in Finland. Most Finns still have a home or a summer cabin in Finland, and so the dual-life can be expensive. Nevertheless, the pension of the average Finn is good when compared to the average Spaniard. Olavi, a retired civil servant, mentioned that his pension is probably higher than the average salary in Spain.

Previously, driving from Finland to Spain was more common, but its popularity has decreased due to the introduction of low-cost air travel. Now, Finnish retirees can order flight tickets online, organize their own journey, and even own a car and a home in two different countries. In addition, housing and other services are easily available in the Finnish language. In contrast to fixed tourism, these new possibilities have been a major step in a post-Fordist direction, and also towards transnational living. The material differences between Northern Europe and Spain make it attractive to outsource one's retirement to obtain a better standard of living, and the European Union has made this process relatively easy. The flow of capital and people is now more open than perhaps ever before (Larsen et al., 2006; Urry, 2007). The economic decision to migrate to the south of Europe is not difficult for most middle-class retirees in Finland. The spatial practices of migration have become easier, but are not the only explanation. The social and mental elements also affect the retirees' transnational lifestyles.

## The mental effects of the flow of information and images

The generation that is now retiring and migrating to Spain for the winter is already accustomed to travelling. The increase in wealth, commercial airlines, and the industry of package holidays made the world smaller for the post-war generations. Even though the package tourism was



organized in fixed ways, it slowly gave people the courage to travel in more self-organized ways (Haug et al., 2007; Vincente, 2001). The idealized view of Spain with its small white houses in the hills and charming fishing villages slowly crumbled away. During these holidays, the conception changed and Finnish people found something else:

*Ritva: I can't remember how I used to think, except that the sun was shining. Maybe I had a more romantic picture. Like when I used to travel to the Costa del Sol, I thought it would be small white villages here and there. I didn't realize before that the whole coast was fully built for mass tourism. That could describe what I realized. But this here is just normal life. (Woman, approximately 63 years old. Interviewed in Torrevieja 16 February 2015)*

Slowly, over their life course, the mental barriers of geographical borders lowered for Finns. Because the Finnish community in the Costa del Sol has been growing since the 1960s, people's knowledge and confidence about surviving in a foreign culture has also grown. For a long time, the Finnish community in Fuengirola has been so strong that Suikki-Honkanen (1996) has argued that Finns live there in a Finnish bubble in which other cultural influences are unwelcome. Torrevieja cannot be described in similar terms because it is much more multicultural and its Finnish community is smaller. Finnish retirees are very much aware that Torrevieja is not an authentic Spanish town, nor do they expect it to be (see Urry, 1995, p. 140). Instead, it offers the opportunity to play with the cultural meanings of Finnish and Spanish space. The gaze can be altered at will from the familiar to the exciting and foreign (Jokinen & Veijola, 1990, pp. 151–152; Urry, 1990). Finnish culture online gives Finnish retirees the chance to construct their cultural environment almost entirely as they please.

*Olavi: You can't feel home-sick here because you don't even notice you're in Spain. Finnish shops thrive because some people buy Juhla Mokka (a Finnish coffee brand) to prevent homesickness. Now interaction via the Internet is so easy on a daily basis. I don't miss the Finnish environment. It is the people that I miss, but I am very much in contact with them. You could think that one is alone but it would be the same in a Finnish apartment building. I would be just as alone there as I am here. Nonetheless, life feels pretty easy. (Man, 64 years old. Interviewed in Torrevieja 14 February 2015)*

By controlling the flow of information and images, Finnish retirees have power in producing their transnational space. Finnish newspapers are reprinted in Spain every morning, and Finnish TV and radio channels are available using a satellite dish or the Internet. In the 1980s, making a phone call from Spain to Finland was difficult and expensive. Now, new information technology is becoming ever more important for staying in touch with family and friends. Email, Skype, and Facebook have become important in maintaining connections transnationally and locally. For example, the active Facebook group [Torrevieja.fi](#) has 4,285 members (as of 18 November 2016), so peer assistance on any topic asked is likely. Users are constantly asking questions about taxes, bureaucracy, and buying property, or just reposting the Finnish news. Facebook groups give people the feeling of belonging to a community – that is, a sense of not being alone. Social media has become an important information source, but it is also crucial for social interaction with friends and relatives (see Pennington-Gray & Schoroder, 2013). Tuulikki, who has lived with her partner for most of the year in Torrevieja for over 13 years, received a video present from her grandchildren for her seventieth birthday:

*Tuulikki: It was titled 'Where do we remember granny?' In Finland, they probably would have come with a cake. We just would have eaten it, and then they would have left. Now the video remains... In Finland grandparents feel that they can't leave their children and grandchildren. [...] They care about us whether we are there or not. (Woman, 70 years old. Interviewed in Torrevieja 18 February 2015)*

Many of the informants reported that their children also live abroad or in other cities, which in sparsely populated Finland can be hundreds of kilometres away. The importance of spatial proximity is diminishing in the primary social network but connecting with loved ones online builds a sense of security and has made the transition abroad easier. Place is not fixed with culture; it lies within the subjects and their social relations. The old representations of space, with all the romantic clichés, have crumbled and something new has arisen – the convenient life of Finnish Spain (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Haug et al., 2007). A new mental space has emerged where people can formulate their own lives using both Finnish and transnational cultural signs (Larsen et al., 2006; Urry, 2007). The community and its mental space are not situated in a geographical location but rather in the social spaces where one can participate – whether through Skype, Facebook, or face-to-face interaction with other Finnish expatriates – in a transnational setting. The material and mental barriers for migration have decreased because of the increased mobility, and they have also brought about a transnational Finnish retiree community with distinct social practices.

### The sociality of the transnational community

The material and mental bases for seasonal migration are inducing factors, but they become entangled with social elements (Williams et al., 2000). My informants described the various ways in which they came to spend their winters in Torrevieja. Some had bought an apartment from a real estate agent straight away. Many of them had previous experience of the Costa del Sol but felt the area to be too touristy. The most important factor described was that most people already had some social ties to the place. In addition, the Finnish community was also a securing aspect. As a result, Finns are most importantly moving to Torrevieja through a snowball effect: the growing Finnish community is strengthening itself from within (see Casado-Díaz et al., 2014). Over the years, Finnish retirees have constructed their own social network and many assisting businesses have been established. The community has enlarged to the point that Finnish retirees can cope without any other language skills. The transnational space of Torrevieja has many social networks for different nationalities, but to access these social spaces, one is required to master the relevant language and culture. Some of my participants spoke Spanish – and other languages – adequately, but the Finnish community remained the primary reference point. In addition to social media, the most important spaces for representing Finnishness in Torrevieja are the churches, the Finnish Association's clubhouse, and the Finnish cafeterias and restaurants. The Finnish Association (active since 1986) plays an important role in community building. Its clubhouse comprises a cafeteria, a library, and most importantly a constant flow of fellow Finns. A couple that I interviewed were founding members of this association.



Tauno: *It started to expand in the Finnish Association's framework and from there. Before that, we gathered in the homes of people who had bigger houses. But when it was set up, it brought people together.*

Maili: *We founded it.*

Tauno: *Here you discover new acquaintances through other acquaintances. It goes like that.*

Maili: *It's like an anchor.*

Tauno: *Yeah, you meet other Finns. If you can't get help there, somebody guides you to someone.*

Maili: *You always hear somebody asking, and the other one telling what to do. Of course, they help you.* (Couple, both 84 years old. Interviewed in Torrevieja 13 February 2015)

Maili and Tauno reported that the first intention in founding the Finnish Association was to buy a boat for the collective use of a small group of Finns. The boat was never bought, but the association grew to become very important in forming the Finnish community. Another space to represent Finnishness was the parish hall, where people gathered to socialize. These places for social gatherings are condensations of the Finnish community constructed out of the need for social belonging, and as a coping strategy to counter the anxiety of feeling alien in a foreign culture (e.g. Jeppsson Grassman & Taghizadeh Larsson, 2013). A woman aged approximately 70 years old described participating at the parish hall:

*In Finland, I would not have participated in so many activities, like the art club and volunteering at the parish hall cafeteria. I used to sing in a choir but here in a foreign culture one seeks the company of those similar to oneself. One can speak Finnish.* (Author's field diary, 12 February 2015)

People who participated in parish hall activities reported that it was mainly to socialize; the religious aspect was minor: 'Many might think we pray there, but we don't. We go there to hang around. It is a very social place.' (Tuulikki, a 70-year-old woman) Retirees can easily find their own type of activity and friends. These representational spaces give the participants a reference point of being and belonging. Sociality becomes the driving force, which is not created through family or work, but by peers who have internalized the same cultural meanings. Daily life in Torrevieja is strongly oriented through social activities, but nevertheless it is not a holiday. Actually, the informants were quite sensitive about people in Finland claiming that their stay in Torrevieja is an extended beach holiday. The daily routines can be quite intense as well, as Leila puts it:

Leila: *Well, we go to outdoor games four times a week, where we meet friends. Now that I'm studying Spanish on Mondays I don't quite make it four times. It takes the whole day. On Monday evening, there's also karaoke and between those, I should have time to make dinner. On Tuesdays, we play mölkky (a Finnish form of skittles) on the beach. After that, we all go for lunch. There might be as many as 10 to 40 there. It's like a social event. Then we walk the few kilometres home and it's already evening. Then we watch TV, we have a TV line<sup>1</sup>. Sometimes we watch the Spanish news. On Wednesdays, we play petanque and there we meet different friends. On Thursdays, there's petanque in La Mata, and we walk six kilometres there. On the way is the Finnish cafeteria. There are always people there; we see friends and talk, drink coffee, and continue walking. In the evening, I make dinner and use Facebook, which takes a lot of time. I belong to several Facebook groups. On Friday, it's the farmers' market. Again, we meet friends there. Today*

1 Internet based portal for watching Finnish TV

*[a Friday], I've already visited a friend in one place. It's like this – social. In between, I need to have time to clean the house, prepare food, and bake – to just do the daily chores. (Woman, 68 years old. Interviewed in Torrevieja 20 February 2015)*

Leila here described an example of how active life as a retiree can be, if desired. Of course, not everyone is this busy. As one informant described, the day can involve one bigger event, otherwise everyday life is a normal retiree's life in Spain – sleeping late, taking a nap during the siesta, washing laundry, and cooking. Even though everyday life is no longer organized through social responsibilities such as work and family, the social activities – like volunteering and participating in events – take their place. By structuring the use of time and space, these routinized activities build a sense of security and community. However, some informants described activities that were exclusive by prior social status. As Leila argued: '[w]hen people are retired, you don't need useless titles.' Overall, Finns described the community as very open. Because most of the different activities are inclusive with both regular and irregular participants, it is easy for new members to join in; one feels a sense of security when one feels welcome. As Ritva puts it: 'Yes, I see it when I'm here alone. You think that it is good that you know people here. I think people here are very helpful. Nobody is left alone. This is how I feel about it.'

During the 30-year period that the Finnish community has been slowly building up in Torrevieja, it has gained such an established level that it is now strengthening even more. Because of the interaction via social media with people back in Finland, more and more people become aware of the possibilities of living a transnational life. When they visit the place for the first time, they get to know the Finnish social space of Torrevieja and its representational spaces. Through the everyday spatial practices of the Finnish community, one can feel secure within the transnational space. Now that space and time are continually being compressed, the shift between the two nations and within the Eurozone is ever more casual. Retirees are taking advantage of the globalizing world by moving to Spain, and there is no doubt that retirement-age mobility is increasing. For Finns, this movement is ever more possible and less spectacular in social, mental, and material ways.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have outlined Finnish retirees' migration to Torrevieja and their everyday lives in transnational space. Lefebvre's (1974/1991) conception of space explains how the transnational community could form on the broad material, mental and social levels, but what gives more depth to this is that the 'time-space compression' – resulting from increased flows of capital, people, information, and images – is also changing the everyday lives of Finnish retirees (Harvey, 1990; Urry, 1995). The social relations in time and space are no longer so dependent on spatial proximity because these flows make the world feel smaller. For the contemporary Finnish retirees, transnational spatiality is very much a mental space with material and social effects. Thereby, the site of inquiry also exists among the people – in their social relations and communications (Marcus, 2014, pp. 399–400). The cultural shift of growing mobility has consequently increased the transnational lives of Finnish retirees in Spain, but it has been an emergent process (Urry, 2010).

Increased consumerism and the introduction of air travel enabled package tourism, which Spain was already active in through promoting mass tourism. After Finns became accustomed to these fixed tourist products, the courage to travel in more self-oriented ways grew. Finland's accession to the European Union, low-cost air travel, and Spain's lower cost of living have made the option of outsourcing retirement to a more convenient setting easier. For Finns and other Nordic people, these flows of people and capital developed into transnational secondhome consumption and retirement migration (e.g. Casado-Díaz, 1999; King et al., 1998). Since the Finnish community in Torrevieja started to form, the flow of people and capital has accelerated. As consumers, the retirees have now attained more power through representational spaces in comparison to when travel was more dependent upon the heavily romantic images controlled by the promoters of package tourism. Nowadays, Finnish retirees are very aware in reporting their experiences via the internet. For the representational practices of Finnish retirees on social media, Torrevieja does not seem like such a far-away destination. The mental proximity of social relations has thereby condensed. This erosion of geographical ties has made it possible to construct mental spaces where the Finnish retirees can adopt familiar cultural meanings to make everyday life secure. In addition, the social interaction with local fellow Finns in the representational spaces of Torrevieja – such as the church, clubhouses, and cafes – reproduces the community within the transnational setting. Now, Finnish retirees have many options for the construction of everyday life in a foreign context. Material and immaterial representational spaces function as emotional anchors – as spaces to perform Finnishness. In the post-Fordist mode of the consumption of time and space, the very mental scale of imagining ways of living is creating new possibilities for transnational retirement, thus Finnish retirees spending their winters in Spain is no longer exceptional. The compression of time-space enables the transnational lives of the Finnish retirees, and such lifestyles are likely to increase.

Even though package tourism as a fixed Fordist product might be diminishing, the agile post-Fordist flows of people, capital, information, and images are increasing (Gale, 2009; Urry, 1995). The lifestyle benefits of contemporary time-space compression currently affect the relatively affluent middle-class retirees most of all, not only because of economic reasons but also due to mental and social reasons (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). The ability to use the full potential of flexible consumption requires skills that are cultivated primarily by middle-class lifestyles. Even though mobility is becoming easier, it is also possible that no massive revolution in retirement migration is imminent. More retirees are migrating to Spain due to the ageing population, but the emotional home continues to be Finland. When retirees get older and their physical well-being decreases, most migrate back to their country of origin, so the 'good life' in Spain is a temporary life project (Kordel 2014, p. 10). However, the current development is making material and immaterial movements more fluid, which can introduce more mutable ways of being in the world. Therefore, examining transnational lives calls for not only a multi-sited understanding (Marcus, 2014), but also for a multi-spatial orientation that is sensitive to material, mental, and social spaces (Lefebvre, 1991). For this orientation, Lefebvre's (1991) reflexive theory of the production of space can provide the tools, but it lacks the understanding of increasing mobility. Urry's (2007, 2010) sense of the importance of mobility provides clues for the future

of international retirement migration, but it needs to be updated to include the changes in the flows of information, such as social media (see Cohen et al., 2015, p. 166; Larsen et al., 2006; Pennington-Gray & Schoroder, 2013). The new ways of consuming time and space may still be changing the forms of international retirement migration, so researchers should remain alert to innovations that affect these transnational lifestyles.

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