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A case study of the perceptions, experiences and relations of British permanent tourists with the host community in Didim, Turkey

This qualitative study aims to examine the perspectives of British permanent tourists settled in Didim, Turkey. The study uses semi-structured interviews to explore and understand the motivations, and interactions of this community with the host society in the location.

The initial findings were that the views of the community were largely positive partly due to the secular nature of Turkish society. The study found that those who were best able to survive in Didim were pensioners deriving their income from the UK. However, these permanent tourists do not generally integrate with their hosts due to issues such as language.

Keywords: Permanent tourists; second home owners; lifestyle migrants; guest perceptions; Turkey

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Introduction: Permanent-Tourist and life style migration or mobility

Attention has long been paid to the general phenomenon of the migration demands of tourists and their mobility. In the 1960s this research focused on tourist migration between the US and Canada. In the 1990s, the attention of academics switched to movements inside the European region, especially from Northern Europe to Southern Europe. *King et al., (2000) and Dwyer (2002)* state that many Northern Europeans retire to Southern European regions for the better climate, as well as for economic, health and other social-cultural and life-cycle factors. More specifically, Jaakson (1986) and Hall & Muller (2004) analysed mobilities and conceptualised home ownership under the umbrella of second homes. Cohen (2008) also stated that these retirement migrations of Western populations are motivated by the desire to live in warmer climates. Moreover, he suggests that these people are also seeking to migrate to less-developed countries because they are seeking a better quality of life.

This quality of life is connected to a number of factors, such as the image of the destination, the wish to spend longer holidays in the region, as well as being attracted by the lower cost of living and the benefit of buying property in a country with lower house prices. O'Reilly, (2007) also states that many migrants were motivated to move because of the dynamics of globalisation. This movement increased further in Europe after EU borders were removed. Many scholars have stated that demand is more complex than just the desire of the retirement population for mobility or ownership of second homes. Benson (2010) analysed British migrants' experiences in France, and conceptualised a new type of mobility under the heading of life style migration (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009). A second example of this analysis by scholars is the concept of life style mobilities proposed by Cohen, Duncan and Thulemark (2015).

The phenomenon of tourist-migration by retirees and the related impacts on locals in various countries has been widely explored in the literature, but most of the research tends to focus on Southern European areas. However, according to Bahar et al. (2009), in recent years British, Scandinavian and German tourists have started to buy properties in Turkey for extended holidays or for semi-migration and retirement. As a result, there is a new social presence in existence in Turkey. According to official data from the Land Registry Directorate's Foreigner Affairs Unit in Turkey, cited by Clancy (2011):

“...British, German are the top foreign buyers of property in Turkey. Foreign buyers from 89 countries have purchased approximately 111,200 properties across Turkey. British people are the most prolific buyers with 35,249 British people owning 24,848 properties, followed by Germany and Greece” (p. 1)

The large numbers of overseas people purchasing homes in Turkey points to the necessity of investigating the phenomenon. As reflected by the comments of the International Strategic Research Organisation in Turkey (ISRA) in a 2008 study, sponsored by The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK), there is an

urgent need to look at this issue. The information collected in the study was mainly quantitative and the ISRA came to the conclusion that:

“There is not a clear understanding of the ‘settled foreigners’ concept within the Turkish public. A sophisticated understanding regarding the issue does not exist, either. Not only settled foreigners are taken as a homogenous group, but also their reasons for coming to the country, their needs and their interests are perceived as common.” (p. 7)

Therefore, there is a recognised gap in knowledge which this study seeks to address

The definition of permanent tourists and second home ownership

There has been a number of terms used in the literature for the phenomenon, each with different emphasis, depending on what aspect was being examined. The term permanent tourist has been used as it is broad enough to overlap all the categories of tourist semi-migration employed in the literature, such as retired immigrants, amenity migrants, second home owners, transnationalism, residential tourists, and expatriate communities who also live and work abroad. (King et al, 2000; O'Reilly, 2000, 2003, 2007; Dwyer, 2002; Hall & Muller, 2004; Helderma, Ham & Mulder 2005; Moss, 2006; Marjavara, 2009; Benson, 2010).

Many of the terms above share criteria with the notion of permanent tourists. In particular, they all possess the motivation to move abroad due to the desire to change life style. Permanent tourists can be classified under life style migration (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009), as well as lifestyle mobility (Cohen et al, 2015), or transnationalism (McHugh, 2000) in which movement can be seen as being on-going or semi-permanent. Permanent tourists often have the intention to move to a location permanently for the life style, rather than migrating for income to the host destinations. However, these other terms are too broad and include all types of semi or permanent migrations and mobility. Their starting points are based on the duration of stay or ongoing mobilities and life style. However, the main feature which differentiates permanent tourists from the above terms is the origin of the tourists' income; it has to come from their original home country. Permanent tourists do not work or earn income in the host country. Therefore they can be still classed as tourists rather than as emigrates or expats. However, as can be seen from this differential, there is no clear and objective cut off point between permanent tourists and the above categories. This is because the terminology also depends on the individuals' self-identification and how they see themselves. O'Reilly (2000) and Deo (2012) emphasize that many of the British community abroad do not want to be classified as immigrants and term themselves expats. Hence, one thing which is definitely certain is that these people do not see themselves as immigrants and they do not wish to be classified in this way. Finally, permanent tourists may or may not be officially registered in the host country.

In the light of the above, not working in the host country is a clear starting point from which to differentiate the phenomenon of permanent tourists from other types of life style mobilities, transnationalism and lifestyle migration or even temporary tourists. This study intends to evaluate the relations of these permanent tourists with the host community.

Second-home owners can be seen as broadly fitting with the permanent tourist category, as well. If the international second home owner's income is derived from their country of origin, rather than from the host country.

Duration of residence in the destination is another significant issue and characteristic of the permanent tourist category. By definition, permanent tourists remain abroad for longer periods than temporary tourists. The duration can be seasonal or consist of shorter, but more frequent, visits or all-year-round settlement (Bell and Ward, 2000).

In conclusion, Cohen's (1974) definition of the term permanent tourist has been used as the basis for identifying the subjects of this study. To this definition have been added the characteristics of duration and self-identification to define permanent tourists as being "persons who, though deriving their income in their country of origin, prefer to take up semi-permanent residence in another country" (p. 537), whether they own property or not. This residence involves relatively longer periods of time spent in the host destination. Permanent tourists also differentiate themselves socially from immigrants and temporary tourists in the area.

Host and guest relations

According to Buller and Hoggart (1994); King, et al, (2000); O Reilly (2003; 2007) and Benson (2010), most of the permanent tourists who settle for longer periods of time in another country do not integrate with the local culture and retain their own culture. This is an important finding for considering the case of host and guest relations in Turkey.

Host and guest relation issues are further exacerbated, if two cultures are very different from each other (Hall, 1994; Nash, 1996; Smith and Brent, 2001; Shaw and Williams 2002; Smith, 2009). From this perspective, the socio-cultural distinctions between two cultures, such as the degree of social similarity or dissimilarity between two cultures, is the main issue for consideration and, if the culture of two groups is similar, then the impacts of tourism will be reduced on the host community (Pizzam and Sussman,1995; Uriely and Reichel, 2000 and Shaw and Williams, 2002).

Buller and Hoggart (1994) suggest that the social background of the host and guest cultures are also important factors in their relations. Griffiths and Sharpley (2013) state that host and guest relations are dynamic, hence these relations change and encounters depend on the hosts' and guests' 'self national identity'. Such beliefs are stronger in some cases than in others and change according to each person and each culture.

Individual differences and personal and ideological perspectives can also play a role as identified by Nash (1996) who suggests that the feelings of the two groups at the start of the relationship will tend to influence all of their experiences and reactions. Sharpley (2013, p. 37) suggests that host perception studies need to focus on the broader aspects of these relations and to employ a 'multi-dimensional' approach, because the encounters between hosts and guests change in time and the relations and role changes depend on context. Most importantly, the host community is dynamic. Many other variables affect their decisions and expectations.

Permanent tourists -second home owners their identity and integration

Berry (1997) emphasises that the success of integration in multicultural societies mainly depends on how much effort immigrants make and the willingness they have to adapt to the host culture, or whether they are at least willing to put effort into understanding the society they live in. If multicultural societies are not able to do this, it usually results in segregation or separation between groups and in the most unsuccessful situation it will result in discrimination by dominant groups and marginalisation issues in the society.

O'Reilly (2007), Benson and O'Reilly (2009) and Benson (2010) conclude that lifestyle migrants (permanent tourists) retain their culture in a host country and create their own existence. These permanent tourists are also different from ordinary working migrants or asylum seekers. Most of them neither integrate into the host community, nor are they assimilated.

Benson's (2010) findings also support King's et al. argument (2000) which claims British retirement populations do not integrate in southern Mediterranean regions, because these populations are not immigrants and hence do not need schooling or to work in the regions. They are also able to use many other services which are familiar to them such as English pubs, restaurants, supermarkets and they live surrounded by a British neighbourhood where English is widely spoken with most locals also understanding and speaking English. King et al. (2000) also state that integration by the retired population is usually an individual or more personal choice, and is optional.

Therefore, and according to the above studies, lifestyle migrants (permanent tourists) do not normally integrate with hosts if they are not financially or socially dependent on the host society.

Host and guest relations in Turkey

The very large numbers of permanent tourists in Turkey, mainly dominated by the British community, are evidence that this phenomenon needs deeper research (Bahar et al, 2009; Sagir 2011)). As Tosun (1998) points out, Turkey needs to *harmonise* host and guest relations more because the main religion of Turkey is Islam and this potentially creates a large cultural gap between the two societies. The impact of tourism and permanent tourists cannot be seen as being neutral, as it affects the social and cultural lifestyle and makes even conservative areas more Westernised. By way of illustration, Marie and Broeck's (2001) study emphasised the social and cultural changes in a village in Pamukkale since tourism was introduced and the resultant increase in Westernisation. According to Sagir (2011), the changes which permanent tourists have had on Turkey need to be clearly identified, particularly if the phenomenon is to increase.

However, it is important to note that despite the wide social and cultural gaps between the Turkish population and European tourists, most of the studies of host and guest relations in Turkey report that the relationship between these groups is largely positive (Bahar et al., 2009; Sagir,2011). This outcome may be explained by the host's financial and economic dependency on the developed world which is also an important factor in host-guest relations in general (Hall, 1994; Nash, 1996; Shaw and Williams,2002; Smith, 2009).

Waller and Sharpley in an ongoing study found that most of the host community in Didim were largely positive about living together with British permanent tourists. However, the hosts' viewpoints are often coloured by political or conservative perspectives. The heterogenic socio-cultural structure of Turkey and its political history and social polarisation is all an essential background to the understanding of host and guest relations in the country.

Westernisation and social and cultural polarisation in Turkey

As identified by Boniface et al. (2009, p.356) Turkey differs culturally from other Islamic nations. The country also has a different history of modernisation for example; the country has a secular constitution. This secularism is due to Turkey recreating its own image since the establishment of the Republic in the 1920s when westernisation policies were firmly established with M. Kemal Ataturk's reforms (Lewis, 1955;1996; BBC2, 2013) The following view point is also highlighted by Erdemir, (2007)

“Turkish governments have always pursued pragmatic and realistic policies, according to demands of the region and the wider world, mostly the West”.

Erdemir, (2007,p.159)

Tosun and Jenkins (1996, p. 519) also identify that tourism has been perceived as a ‘panacea’ in Turkey to solve economic problems, and as a major driving force for the purposes of social engineering in society.

Westernisation, as an idea, was seen as a civilising of society in Turkey and this viewpoint was also shared by some public individuals, as they wanted to become a member of the European Union. However, not all of the population share the same viewpoint. Yashin (2002, p.189) identified two dominant cultures in Turkey: secularism and Islamism. The author also states that there is evidence of a long political battle between Islamists' and secularists' in daily life and in newspapers since the 1980s and 1990s. Yashin (2002) states that

“secularism is studied in the self-referential terms of secularism and is associated with other supposedly derivative terms such as “modernity”, “nationality” and “democracy”. (2002, p.189)

The two schools of thought described above are both strongly established in Turkey and represent the main polarisation of the country's society today.

Methodological approach

In order to arrive at an understanding of permanent tourists and local interactions, this study employed a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research is the most suitable research method in this case, as it seeks a deep understanding of other people's perceptions and experiences. The method allows researchers to scrutinize issues under investigation in an in-depth way through techniques such as case studies, focus groups,

story-telling, content or thematic analysis of interview transcripts (McGregor & Murnane, 2010; Silverman, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Foddy, 1993; Lacey and Luff, 2001).

In order to understand the relations between permanent tourists and the host community in Didim, Turkey this study uses qualitative methods and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to consider the data. According to Smith and Osborn (2008) and Howitt and Cramer (2011), this method focuses on understanding respondents' feelings and their patterns of behaviour.

Sampling

According to Creswell (2009), interviews should be done in natural settings; that is in the locations where the people involved would normally be. For these reasons, interviews were carried out in the Aegean and western part of Turkey, where British people bought properties (Didim). Interviews took place in August 2014, including 25 British permanent tourists (these included second-home owners and other lifestyle migrants). The interviews were aimed at exploring issues from the viewpoints of the British permanent tourists. To understand the characteristics and motivations of these permanent tourists, all the samples were purposely chosen from British nationals (mainly English and Scottish origin) and second-home owners in Didim. Most of them were aged 50+, retired and drawing income via pensions from the UK. However, some others, aged below 50, were also British second-home owners with younger family members, as well as other lifestyle migrants. The project had the aim of understanding and establishing general characteristics of those purchasing second properties in Turkey, as well as critically assessing their encounters with the Turkish host community.

Results

Returning home for financial reasons

The interviewees in this study had previously often holidayed in the region, and then bought properties for retirement in order to gain a better quality of life than in Britain, due to improved weather, and income allowing them to go further. Some of the interviewees differed from this group in that they had purchased properties for semi- and seasonal holidays in Didim.

Permanent tourists are the only group of lifestyle migrants who have survived in Didim as other types of life style migrates could not survive financially. Most of the British permanent tourists confirmed that some permanent tourists had been forced to return to the UK for financial reasons. These individuals were described as not having considered their financial situation well; many had moved to Turkey when the interest rates on their savings from the Turkish banks were at 25% (in the early 2000s). However, the interest rates had fallen to around 9% which the interviewees said had been too low for these other permanent tourists to survive.

The main reason why permanent tourists will not return to UK

Most interviewees reported that they call Didim home and stated that they are very happy to live there, and they were very certain about not going back to the UK. They also emphasised that they would only return to UK for health reasons, if they had a very serious health issues (NHS -free UK health insurance). Otherwise they would stay in the destination for as long as they could.

The main reason cited for not returning to UK was that “ life mainly involved long hours of work” and some British permanent tourists also complained about the UK changing socially and culturally. These respondents said that “*England is not England anymore*”.

Respondent 1 spoke for many when she stated that “*especially in my home town too many foreign people live and I feel I don’t not belong there anymore. I feel foreign there*”. The respondent believed that she and her husband were fully integrated into the host society because they were invited into host homes, to weddings and other social events.

Apart from a few individuals, most permanent tourists were not able to speak the hosts’ language. This is despite Didim’s local government providing free Turkish classes. Most permanent tourists stated that they had tried to learn the host language, but they had given up. However, they are able to survive with some minimal knowledge of the host language. On the other side some respondents also emphasised that the hosts preferred to speak in English with them, rather than in Turkish. Permanent tourists also mainly preferred socialising together, such as meeting up every day or week in cafes and restaurants, and they had similar viewpoints. They organised events, social activities and charity groups. They stuck together on many issues such as the decision not to join the Turkish National Health Service.

Relations with hosts

Almost all of the permanent tourists were very happy to live in Didim, and most of them liked the Turkish way of life in the town. Some of them reported having Turkish friends, while others framed the relationship with locals as being more like acquaintances. Almost all of the interviewees believed that their life styles were suitable to the way of life in Didim and believed that they do fit into the town.

Some permanent tourists complained about the way business is done in Didim, for example being charged more than natives and the existence of some shady deals. Some respondents were more critical about the hosts’ professionalism, because local business people were not punctual and workers and builders often arrived very late. Respondent 3 stated that “*hosts have their own time -Turkish time*”.

Respondent 4, who had lived in Didim for many years, and could speak the host language fluently, claimed that she had integrated with the host community very well and criticised the lifestyles of permanent tourists in Didim. This respondent reported that British permanent tourists did not take advice from the local hosts, professionals or people like herself who were married with a host local. These respondents expressed the view that British permanent tourists should be more careful before committing to opening a businesses or buying a house.

Respondent 4 said that the British community complained about being ripped off, but Turkish restaurants, bars and businesses in Didim were only open for six months in the year so there is a limited opportunity to make money. Respondent 4 added:

- Respondent 4: “ Do you buy a house from waitress in UK?... in UK we buy a house from professional and state agent. But British people buy and bought a property from anyone in Didim!...
- Interviewer: Why they do it here?
- Respondent 4: Whenever they live abroad or holiday they leave their brain at the airport.... They do not do that in UK why they do in here why behave like that in here? ...They think they know everything but they don't!”

She added that most British permanent tourists started drinking very early in the morning and she said “*What are Turkish people going to think about them?*”

Culture and religion are not the same, but they don't cause problems

Most permanent tourists identified that the local culture was not similar to theirs, but permanent tourists were very happy to live with it. Most British permanent tourists think that the host community was more family-oriented than British people and similar to how the UK had used to be.

Interestingly, one eighteen year-old British respondent (Respondent 9) said she had lived in Didim with her parents for eight years and did not want to go to the UK, even not for holidays and that she did not miss the UK.

Respondent 9 reported that she and her British father had integrated into Didim and had many Turkish friends and that she was fluent in Turkish language, went to Turkish school and was preparing for the university exam in Turkey. When asked whether her Turkish friends treated her as a British girl she said no and that she was treated as a local, that she had a Turkish name, and that she prefers Turkish culture and the family life style because they were more cosy with each other.

Another respondent interviewed (12) summarised the lifestyle of British permanent tourists and their relations with the hosts in Didim. The respondent said that they bought property in Turkey

- “because it's a better standard of living, money goes further than it would in England, and good weather I like it warmer”
- “and we did not want to work anymore”

The couple stated that they had considered Egypt as a retirement destination but had rejected this because “...for me Egypt is a Muslim country and women in Egypt ... as second class citizens and [I said] I was not going to put up for that 'cos I am not used to that”. When asked about the situation in Turkey the respondent stated that the situation of Turkish women was better “...not as good as in England, but it is better” while her husband stated that “because

[Turkey] is liberal”. There were features of life in Turkey she disliked however, such as being overcharged compared to the native population and people throwing rubbish on the street. In contrast, social relationships were seen positively.

“...one of the things I really liked about here [is] we have more friends in here than we had in England, because in England we were working, so you don’t get an opportunity to make so many friends there”

Asked about the nationality of her friends she added “ ... obviously more English than Turkish”. Asked, whether the Turks are close friends she responded with no, but her husband claimed that some were and provided names.

Most respondents had also similar viewpoints about the issue of different religions and said that “*religion is different, but religion is never an issue between us and the hosts*”. Respondent 5 stated, that “*the hosts don’t put their religion in your face*”. Respondent 6 also stated that “*we have a Holy Mary church in the region. I am not Catholic, but we use it together and are very happy to have it*”. It seems when it comes to religion, both groups are respectful of each other and religion is not a problematic issue between them.

Some of the British permanent tourists, who can use the host language fluently, have integrated with the host community very well. These respondents were generally and socially more open to other cultures. Two respondents (respondents 12), stated that “*respect the host community and they return the same respect*”. It seems some British permanent tourists have made more effort to build stronger relations with hosts and to be involved in the social life of the host community, such as organised football games with local work forces and that these people speak the hosts’ language relatively well. By way of example, respondent 7 believed that he was well-integrated with the host community and said that he had been accepted as who he was. He reported going fishing with the village fisherman and being the only English man in their boat in winter time. When asked about the cultural differences between himself and his hosts he said:

“ I have found it very similar because wherever I go in the world I don’t think religion makes any difference to anybody because end of the day we all human beings we all love each other we all like to help people religion is no problem....”

He stated that he did not feel that the host community put him under any pressure. Respondent 7 also added that:

“ ... all you have to do is I found if you give people respect who they are they give you respect who you are...so everybody looked after each other respect is the first word ”

Respondent 7 also said that he believes that he has many Turkish friends, as well as:

“a lot of Turkish... what we call acquaintances- a lot of people I know but I don’t know that well is to be ...[friends]”

Conclusion

This study has identified a number of issues. Respondents often reported choosing Turkey because they had looked for a better quality of lifestyle in a place where their money went further. They also reported seeking escape from the long hours of work in UK. Both of these observations confirm Cohen's (2008) claim that Westerners move to warmer and less developed countries to improve their quality of life. For this reason many British people chose to settle in the Didim region as they believed they could live on the interest from their savings alone. For some, the drop in Turkish interest rates in the late 2000's forced them to leave the country. It seems like that the ones who stayed permanently were the ones whose income was stable, such as pensioners and retired people who drew income from their home country.

The literature suggests that religious differences may cause issues between permanent tourists and hosts. The respondents in this study acknowledge that there are cultural and religious differences between the two cultures, but almost all of them state that these differences were not an issue. This may be explained by Turkey's modernisation and secularist history (Lewis, 1996; Tosun and Jenkins 1996; Yashin, 2002; Erdemir, 2007). However, as discussed in Gulalp (1998), Yashin (2002), and Waller and Sharpley (in an ongoing study), Turkey is a polarised society and to some extent these issues depend upon which types of hosts permanent tourists are involved with.

The study also found that according to some British permanent tourists, the main issues for them are less-related to the culture, but do more to do with a perceived lack of professional business practises. The issues identified may perhaps be due to the businesses being located in small villages, to differences in regulations and bureaucratic procedures, or down to the fact that commerce is not as regulated as it is in Europe. The study has also found that in some cases British permanent tourists fail to take advice from the appropriate professionals when engaging in business or property transactions.

All of the above interviews give the impression that permanent tourists have learned how to live in the community, but their relations with hosts seem more like acquaintanceships. Even where people consider themselves to be well-integrated, they describe themselves as being expats in the country. It seems that most respondents' relations are rather superficial, due to different life-style expectations as well as the language barrier. Most British home owners state that they have tried to learn the host language, but failed because of their age, or general laziness.

Not surprisingly, the well-integrated group is able to speak the hosts' language very well. They tend to view the situation in Didim in the same way as members of the host community and they worry about how they are seen by the host community. Those who are more integrated appear to be more likely to be involved with hosts; generally being more open to other cultures, or else being children who grew up and went to school or are married to locals which is closer to transnational or life style migration categories. The results of this study concur with those of other authors (King et al., 2000; O'Reilly, 2007; Benson, 2010) who found that British retirees and permanent tourists of lifestyle migrant style do not generally integrate with hosts, if they do not need their services. The decision to do so is optional and down to individual choice.

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