

## Article

# Me, myself and I: The coexistence of local, immigrant and tourist identity

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## Abstract

*In times of high globalization, mobility has changed the concept of distance, and thus altered the formation of the identity of people who choose to practise tourism or migrate. The transition from migration-led-tourism (MLT) to tourism-led-migration (TLM) has been widely studied. The purpose of this study is to discuss the multi-centred identities that immigrants develop during their stay, and the factors that trigger the transformation from one self to another. Email interviews were conducted with 33 lifestyle immigrants in order to discover a plurality of factors of self-reflection shared by locals, tourists and immigrants. The importance of place attachment and social interaction has been highlighted.*

## Mobility in terms of tourism or immigration

As reported by Hall (2004), tourism is a specific form of temporary, short-term mobility (according to the OECD in 2001, of no more than one consecutive year), with the intention of returning home, avoiding permanent residence in, and remuneration from, the places visited. Migrants, on the other hand, are looking for a new home (Kannisto 2016), a new permanent residence. Immigrants are different from natives or locals, especially if immigration occurred after young adulthood (Zimmerman et al.

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2007; Xie et al. 2014), while their lack of organic ties with the host community, their different way of thinking and their greater mobility can make them appear more objective (Haug et al. 2007). Experimenting with the concept of looking for many new houses but having none and therefore questioning the definition of ‘permanence’ (Williams & Hall 2000) is more of an attribute of the global nomad, who travels from place to place (Kaplan 1996), or the migrant tourist worker or temporary migrant, who combine leisure and discovery with participation in the market (Williams & Hall 2000).

One-way migrations are a more permanent state of being, and require long-term decisions regarding future quality of life and thus a greater sense of commitment than that needed by the more spontaneous and less risky decisions involved in the temporary stay of a tourist (Haug et al. 2007). These long-term decisions are made as part of the search for individual material betterment and well-being; they involve economic factors, such as currency exchange and pricing; social factors, like language, the friendliness of local people, occupations or urban design; and cultural contexts, such as institutions and customs (Oigenblick & Kirschenbaum 2002; Bowen & Schouten 2008).

On the other hand, lifestyle migrants focus on the search for a better quality of life, in terms of greater relaxation, the search for political stability, warmer weather or better working conditions and job status (Williams & Hall 2000; Feng & Page 2000; Carson & Carson 2017). It is typically associated with a one-off lifestyle-led transition from one territory to another, where mobility between the two depends on personal links and seasonal motivations (Gustafson 2001). In this paper, the focus will be directed upon this type of migration. The difference between lifestyle mobility and lifestyle migration stands upon the on-going process of the first and the less frequent realization of the second (Cohen, Duncan & Thulemark 2013).

Moving on, there seems to be a multi-causal and symbiotic connection between tourism and migration (Feng & Page 2000; Bowen & Schouten 2008; Dwyer et al. 2014). According to Williams and Hall (2002), there is a distinction between Tourism-Led Migration (TLM), which means moving from tourism to migration for both labour and consumption, and Migration-Led Tourism (MLT), where mobility is stimulated by trips to visit friends and relatives (VFR). In the former case, labour migration to a destination occurs when the constant flow of tourists there creates the need for a

tourism industry and thus a demand for skilled labour, as in senior management with intra- and inter-company transfers (Williams & Hall 1999). The choice could be based on holiday preferences made in their home country (Kang & Page 2000), or even on personal experience during their visit to the destination; tourism here is a pre-immigration facilitator, since the destination is now identifiable with tourist satisfaction (Central Bureau of Statistics 1999; Oigenblick & Kirschenbaum 2002; Bowen & Schouten 2008).

As well as labour migration, consumption-related-migration refers to the tourism flows and spatial results that property ownership, retirement migration and second-home development may generate (Williams & Hall 1999; Feng & Page 2000). However, the permanent status of consumption or labour migration creates cultural diversity, leading to changes in the cultural life of the destination country (Dwyer et al. 2014) through the interrelation of different national identities (Williams & Hall 2000).

In the MLT case, immigration generates additional tourism when an individual moves to a new country, leading to visits by friends and relatives as well as by the individual back home, (Feng & Page 2000; Seetaram 2012; Dwyer et al. 2014). These tourist flows depend on the strength of the bond between the different agents, where the importance of ethnic reunion is highlighted by the need for belonging, the importance of social obligation related to family ties, and on the particularities of the place (Williams & Hall 1999; Feng & Page 2000; Seetaram 2012). Moreover, receiving VFR tourism in the new destination gives the immigrant the role of the host, resulting in trips to non-routine places and validating the decision to take time to explore the place where they decided to work (Griffin 2017). The co-construction of meaning among friends and family is developed during the cultural discovery, understanding and interpretation of this new spatial context (Griffin 2017).

### **Place attachment whether being a local, immigrant or tourist**

International migrants create a tendency known as transnationalism, meaning the individual process of production and reproduction of relationships and multi-centred identities of migrants between their countries of origin and host destinations through an abstract awareness of one's belonging (Basch et al. 1994; Ghosh & Wang 2003;

Gustafson 2006; Murray 2007). This tendency goes beyond the traditional one-directional flow of migration to the host destination and focuses on the on-going socio-cultural and economic exchange process of discourses and signifiers between countries, allowing a combination of mobility, migration and multiple place attachments (Gustafson 2006), and creating – as previously mentioned – an attractive magnet for VFR tourism. Thus, transnationalism analyses immigrants' constructed social contexts that link together the country of emigration and the one of immigration.

The relation of people to place may occur in various ways, such as through a sense of home, a sense of citizenship or affinity with place (Conraddon & McKay 2007). Chosen places of residence – when considered valuable - play a significant role in the sense of belonging (Savage et al. 2005), introducing the concept of network relationships between places. Attachment to one single place is weakened when shared with other places (Gustafson 2001), creating multiple links with multiple places.

These place attachments are the result of social interactions and their generated meanings and beliefs that are located in particular sites (Hay 1998). According to Scannell and Gifford (2010), place attachment is related to the person; to the place, meaning the social bonding with the place and its people and connection with the physical and built environment; and finally to the process of attachment. Yet, this process of attachment can also be interrupted by disruptions of the people-place bonding, referring to involuntary breaks that may entail a degree of loss or identity discontinuity (Fried 2000).

Place attachment as a process consists of affective, cognitive (George & George 2004) and behavioural levels (Scannell & Gifford 2010). More specifically, affective attachment can develop through emotional investment in a place (Brown et al. 2003). Cognitive attachment mostly refers to memories, knowledge, ideas, attitudes, values and meanings of behaviour (Scannell & Gifford 2010). Finally, behavioural attachment is expressed through actions such as maintaining proximity to a place, the reconstruction of place when it is lost, and relocation to similar places, (Scannell & Gifford 2010).

In order for attachment to start taking place, migrants must connect with their host countries and begin the process of adaptation and acculturation. This is a long and

dynamic process which can lead to a complete or partial acceptance of the local culture, or even its rejection (Berry 1997). It requires social interaction with locals and the discovery of a territory through intra-regional travel or domestic tourism, where newcomers have the opportunity to improve their cultural awareness and create a sense of belonging regarding the new community in which they live (Feng & Page 2000; Griffin 2017). One of the most important elements in this acculturation is knowledge of the local language, while those who resist learning it show a strong tie with their home country (Kang & Page 2000). This implies that immigrants may not fully adapt to the culture they find in the host destination. In the study by Haug et al. (2007), Norwegian immigrants in Spain were unable to connect with the local culture to such a degree that it was only the climate that reminded them of their location, while their social relations were with fellow Norwegians.

In contradiction to the concept of transnational, much less attention has been given to defining who a local is. The term basically refers to those who remain in their birthplace since they prefer being connected to and identified with their local culture, keeping a closed position and defending their local cultural capital and 'roots' (Gustafson 2006; Murray 2007). For Roudometof (2005), being a local as a signifier of identity should be more related to degrees of attachment. This degree of attachment depends on factors like neighbourhood, city, country, attachment to local culture and degree of protectionism, and the importance individuals give to these elements (Roudometof 2005). Yet, for Murray (2007) the local is also determined by a common identity; place provides physical and geographical references as well as a shared history and culture, while identities formed within a local place are neither chosen nor permanent, but rather socially evolving (Gupta & Gerguson 1997).

Even though research has largely focused on the relationship between transnationalism and identity, as well as on the particular role of tourism and immigration, and, to a lesser degree, local, it has failed to study the simultaneous appearance of these roles within the same individual who chooses a transnational lifestyle. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the conditions and moments in which an immigrant passes from feeling like a tourist to feeling like a local in the host destination, showing the co-existence of a multi-centred identity.

For this purpose, the use of the email interview was considered to be most appropriate, since it eliminated geographical limitations and created a delimited space where both multi-cultural sides could communicate (Henkel 2000). The interviews were conducted between December 2016 and January 2017; once they had agreed to participate, interviewees were given two weeks to reply. The interviews comprised a structured guideline of 20 open-ended questions, which was sent to a sample of 33 lifestyle migrants with different profiles, features and circumstances. The aim was to study the process of adaptation and acculturation to the host destination, focusing on the moments of identity consciousness.

The sample consisted of 17 male and 16 female migrants aged between 21 and 60, who range from the early stages of migration (1 month) to the developed stage (35 years). The only factor that was considered important to maintain as stable was the search for immigrants that had applied a transnational mobility between only two countries, the emigrating and immigrating one, putting aside the nomad profile.

The interview transcripts were analysed to identify a thematic framework of the migrants' experiences in adapting to the host destination. The researcher's interest in the immigrant's adaptation while residing in the host destination led to the application of theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006). In this study, the main concepts of the interviewees' answers were highlighted and grouped so as to formulate three key themes that comprised the depiction of their experiences of residing in a foreign country; these refer to the simultaneous identification of the subject with the immigrant, local and tourist identity.

### **'Me' as an immigrant**

Feeling like an immigrant is an emotional attribution that according to the data is directly or indirectly caused by exterior and/or interior stimuli, in the form of reminders of cultural diversity. External reminders focus on the interpreted socio-cultural meanings that place communicates directly or indirectly to our interviewees. Three types of external reminders were detected, referring to living within a multicultural context, the daily routines which should be adapted, and the social interaction with either locals or people of their country of origin.

Residing in a multicultural context provides a constant reminder of one's identity, as mentioned here, *"Where I live, there are a lot of Asian and Moroccan people, they are immigrants but I am too, so that's why I feel like immigrant."* (Spain to The Netherlands). The meeting in such places of residents of different nationalities normalizes the sense of coexistence between several cultural profiles, the local being merely one of them.

Yet, our interviewees coincide in the power of social interaction as a reminder of who is who. The phenomenon of a closed uninterested society was considered a barrier to develop social contacts by sharing experiences and ideas. In small towns, the barrier is detected in terms of not possessing the local identity and thus automatically being pushed aside by locals themselves, while in bigger cities the lack of locals' personal interest in learning new cultures was the basic motivation. The impression of locals that the local reality is the only significant reality, minimizes the reasons to look social for contacts among locals and makes interaction with other immigrants a preferable choice.

*"Honestly, people aged approximately between 16 and 25 don't care about any other country but United States. It seems they live in a common bubble where they don't realize about what is going on out their frontiers."* (Spain to USA)

Nonetheless, social interaction can create reminders of the immigrant identity when the topic of conversation does not match with the individual's personal reality. Throughout informal conversations with locals, the actual needs they face become the basic topic of conversation. Being a foreigner in a country with economic needs automatically creates interpretations of exploitation, making social interaction a process under caution.

As expected, language barriers hinder the high level of social interaction that is needed in order to create longer-lasting social relationships or even to conduct simple commercial interactions. The inability to express themselves exactly as they would in their mother tongue or to comprehend what is said to them by locals, apart from an obstacle to develop a conversation, is a reminder that the acculturation process is not completed.

*"Customs was easy (to learn) as I'm very adaptable and I had previous knowledge of the culture. Language proved to be more difficult because even*

*though I had studied English all my life, I lacked fluency and I also found very hard to understand the Scottish accent or other English native speakers when they were speaking among them very fast.” (Spain to UK)*

Nonetheless, social interaction works as a reminder also in the case of contact with people of their emigrating country. When the subject does not feel or want to feel anymore as one of them, the social encounters are basically reminders of his/her distancing from his/her identity as a local to his/her country of origin. The past appears static and thus a reminder of the lifestyle that was chosen to leave behind, or a complete stranger because the subject has not followed its evolution, cutting off emotional place attachments.

*“Every time I go back, it’s just the same as well. Nothing really changes and I lost the ‘emotional’ connection to some of them. You just get detached, when you don’t see people for a very long time and you don’t get excited about stuff that’s happening there because you are not there anymore.” (Switzerland to Austria)*

Besides the external reminders, interviewees have also mentioned internal ones, meaning a personal desire to keep alive the identity connected to the emigrating country. These reminders are expressed through feelings of belonging to their country of origin, maintaining cultural habits from the past, or a simple acceptance that they are not there to stay forever, since the immigrating country was not as expected. The first case refers to when they meet a tourist/immigrant from their home country and communication takes place about their shared culture. In contradiction to the previous case mentioned, encounter with someone of the same country is a motivation to remember and enhance the bonds one has with their past home.

*“We are always from the place we were born, and there is no way to get rid of it.” (Spain to USA)*

Putting aside the general desire to keep that part of one’s identity alive, there are specific actions and behaviours that maintain this bond and are related to daily routine activities, regarding gastronomic choices, cultural habits or cultural programs online available.

### **‘Myself’ as a local**

Interviewees presented feeling like a local as the result of successful integration within the host community; that is, a sense of mirroring the lifestyle of a local and feeling as a local through social interaction. The lifestyle of a local is enhanced by obtaining the stability locals have, in terms of occupation, housing, and civil state and rights.

*“I feel like a local because I have lived in the same apartment for about a year and it feels like home, and because I have a job working with the local wildlife.”*  
(England to Costa Rica)

Finally, stability on a personal level allows for the creation of the feeling of local belonging since contact with society is easier and constant. Many of the respondents who have lived in the host country for a long time have a majority of friends who are locals, or have related to locals.

*“I am married and have three half-Catalan, half-English children, so that helps me integrate.”* (England to Spain)

Yet, this sense of stability is found in the little daily things, like adapting to timetables, habits and the daily routine. The participation in extra community activities allows for the gradual development of a sense of belonging and for a more profound knowledge of the immigrating country which represents the new home. This personal effort broadens the social context of the subjects and the basis of feeling as one of them is gradually established.

*“But, now, I am feeling like a local. I am not going to these touristic places, I know more or less the city (it’s small, so it’s easy to get around once you know it), I know how public transport works, I have my Dutch SIM Card, my personalized public transport card, I am almost a dutchie girl.”* (Spain to The Netherlands)

Yet, participation itself is not enough to develop the feeling of being a local. Respondents mainly emphasized the social recognition of local awareness, whether being able to answer the questions of other foreigners or participating in a conversation

about local subjects. The most significant instrument for that to be accomplished proved to be the knowledge and use of the local language. It's not just about knowing the language but the moment one realizes that the local makes no longer adjustments so as to understand them.

Finally, a closer connection towards the local identity is realized when the subjects interact with friends and relatives of the country of origin. According to our interviewees, this connection with their past drives them towards the local identity on two occasions, when they show them around their new home, and when they go back home. On the other hand, on a more negative sense, feeling connected to the local identity of the host country is realized by the subject when they feel disconnected to the local identity of their country of origin.

*“The basic way of thinking of people is that I am on vacations all the time since I work in tourism, while I work an average 80 hours a week. So being told every day that I am lucky and that I cannot complain of anything since this was my choice can be very frustrating. It tends to destroy some relationships, especially since we are not present at some important moments or to share moment with people.”* (France to Zambia)

### **‘I’ as a tourist**

Feeling like a tourist is less-frequently mentioned as an identity adopted by immigrants than the other two identities. Regional experiences, whether with friends and family or on one's own, can provide the emotion felt by the tourist and an escape from the immigrant identity. The interviewees mention two basic occasions when they adopt the tourist identity. The first is when they undertake tourism for their own pleasure, such a choice therefore being a conscious one. That is, feeling like a tourist, not when visiting touristic places, but when visiting them for the first time, or even when participating in local cultural events, and the lack of knowledge of where things are located and what specific activities means is present.

*“When I am taking part in celebrations and feel like an outsider because I don't know what's going on nor do I understand what they are talking about or why they are celebrating what.”* (Switzerland to Austria)

On the other hand, behaving like a tourist is also reported when family and friends visit and the hosts listen to the description of the tourist gaze of their people. VFR tourism provides an opportunity for the immigrant to revisit places that they saw when they consciously practised tourism at some earlier time.

*“I love it when guests come and I can see the places again through the eyes of a tourist.”* (Germany to Spain).

Behaving as a tourist is more of a conscious identity adaptation, but when others behave towards the subject as if s/he were a tourist, it's an unconscious identity reminder of being a tourist. According to our interviewees, when the physical appearance of the immigrant does not coincide with the local predominant appearance or when they are unable to follow or speak the local language to a basic level, the behaviour of these locals at some occasions triggers the tourist identity. These occasions usually have a negative connotation, towards tourist economic exploitation.

*“There's too many people selling stuff in the streets, and when they see you they think you are a tourist with money and they always try to sell you something. It's hard to walk on the street without people bothering you. Also taxis they always try to cheat you. I really hate that.”* (Spain to Philippines)

## **Conclusions**

There is a well-established contemporary debate regarding the cause-effect relationship between tourism and migration within a transnational context, demonstrating how one form of mobility can lead to another. However, the aim of this exploratory study was to show the multi-centred identity (Williams & van Patten 2006) of the lifestyle immigrant's profile, where the change from one to another is triggered by factors that affect place attachment (Scannell & Griffin 2010), related either to the country of origin or the host country.

Specifically, in the case of self-reflection as a local, the subjects identified moments of place attachment related to the person, place and process regarding solely the host country. In terms of the personal dimension of place attachment, interviewees emphasized the importance of connecting with locals or with multicultural residents

who form part of the current local identity. The creation of friendships as well as new family constructs generate shared experiences that, in time, enhance social ties within the host community. As far as the place dimension is concerned, self-reflection as a local means avoiding those physical places characterized by the visits of tourists, and mostly using the same places that locals use, being in, and sharing their social arena. Finally, interviewees noted the three levels of process in place attachment when describing their adaptation to the host community.

Mirroring the lifestyle of the locals and their daily routines, subjects who have created the sense of home in the host country display a well-being and emotional bonding that reflect affective place attachment. This process takes more effort and time when the cultural differences between the host country and the country of origin are significant, but despite the heterogenous sample, this attachment has been widely observed. They feel comfortable, useful and part of the community, while the latter, when it bestows immigrants with the same civil rights that local residents enjoy, enhances that level of affective attachment. Acting like a local in typical daily routines and participating in activities organized by the local community, that is, in the social arena, develops attitudes that favour behavioural place attachment, where proximity to the host place is achieved through repetitive actions. This daily contact and experience inevitably leads to a deeper knowledge of the values and meanings that the new home represents.

However, a distancing from adaptation to the local identity occurs when there is only partial place attachment or even 'non-attachment' to the host country due to reminders of the cultural diversity and barriers to integration into the community. In terms of reminders, behavioural place attachment in the country of origin occurs when subjects preserve and repeat rituals and cultural activities of their past in the new destination, or when they communicate with people of their own nationality. This indicates an effort to stay close to their roots while they try to make some connection with the host country.

A threat to the process of place attachment in the host destination, at least in terms of how quickly this occurs, is more present when barriers to social integration appear in the immigrants' descriptions. Difficulty learning, and thus using, the local language impedes communication within the social arena, affecting social attachment. On another level, the unwillingness or lack of eagerness of locals to socialize with immigrants, or their treatment of them as non-locals, as well as the institutional barriers

of limited civil rights, exacerbate affective place non-attachment in the host country, bringing doubt to the wish to belong.

Finally, self-reflection as a tourist occurs – to a lesser degree – when the subject is being a tourist, being treated like one, or acting like one. The first example mostly happens at the beginning of the stay in the host destination, when the places and cultural activities of tourist interest are discovered and experienced; since these places are rarely re-visited, this creates a fragile attachment to the host destination. Interviewees also mentioned visiting places of symbolic value to them, since they represent their own culture; such visits, therefore, represent a behavioural attachment to the country of origin.

The second case, of being treated like a tourist, and especially at tourist attractions, refers to the importance of territorial variables in identifying the nationality of users of that place. There is a clear lack of connection between the subject and the place, which indirectly produces an unsuccessful social place attachment in terms of being one of them, not in terms of being welcome. Finally, subjects reflect the role of tourist onto themselves when they act as such during VFR visits. In this case, tourism is not the result of a personal choice, but forms part of the host's role. The role of resident as host increases their sense of attachment to local places and cultures (Humbrecht 2015). Thus, the dimension of person in place attachment to the country of origin is highlighted when immigrants are the local host.

To sum up, the purpose of this study was to discuss the multiple selves that immigrants develop during their stay in the host destination and the triggers that lead from one self to another. Apart from the well-studied transition from MLT to TLM, there seem to be occasions where social interaction and place interact to such a degree that subjects are transformed from immigrants into locals or tourists, or simply reminded of their immigrant identity. These moments are developed during the adaptation and acculturation process in the host community (Berry 1997) and are associated with place attachment, whether referring to the host destination or the country of origin. Place attachment solely to the host destination forces the appearance of the local self, whereas non-attachment from that process, or attachment to the place of origin, reminds subjects of their immigrant nature or allows them to simulate the tourist role.

These interruptions to place attachment may also explain the importance of place and social interaction as part of the process of social integration.

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