LIFESTYLE MIGRATION TO TURKEY:
EU CITIZENS LIVING ON THE TURKISH SUNBELT

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Lifestyle migration terms the migration movement of relatively affluent individuals moving voluntarily to the places where they believe they can lead a better life. This is a form of migration that emerges related to rapid globalization and there is a strong nexus between lifestyle migration and tourism. Repeating previous tourist visits to the destinations are the main connection with the migration areas and purchasing second homes is a “stepping stone” (Casado-Diaz 2012) towards permanent or seasonal retirement migration. Friends and relatives already living in the destination are also influential in migration decision. O’Reilly and Benson (2009, 2) point out that the previous research has attempted to link the mobilities to wider phenomena using umbrella concepts such as retirement migration, leisure migration, international counter-urbanization, second home ownership, amenity seeking or seasonal migration. Combining these different conceptualizations, O’Reilly and Benson (2009) suggest the term “lifestyle migration” which is described as the migration movement of “relatively affluent individuals, moving, en masse, either part or full time, permanently or temporarily, to countries where the cost of living and/or the price of property is cheaper; places which, for various reasons, signify a better quality or pace of life. Lifestyle migrants are individuals with high mobility, permanently or seasonally relocating to the areas in pursuit of a better way of life.

The seasonal or permanent migration of elderly northern Europeans towards the coastal areas of Southern European countries like Spain, Portugal, France, Italy and Greece has become an important phenomenon. The Mediterranean and the Aegean coastal zone of Turkey have also emerged as a new destination for lifestyle migrants from Northern Europe in the last two decades. However Turkey is known as an emigration country and a transition country for the irregular population movements, as Tolay (2012) attracts attention; immigration towards Turkey has become a significant phenomenon attracting more academic interest in recent years. Actually it is difficult to know the total number of the immigrants in Turkey but according to İçduygu and Biehl

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(2012), it is estimated to be nearly 250,000, including regular and irregular migrants. The number of residence permits as another indicator of migrant stock was 175,000 in 2008. “The emergence of Turkey as a country of destination within the international immigration system which is highly shaped by economic and political factors dates back to the 1990’s (İçduygu 2004, 80); the country’s experience with the new forms of migratory moves that are not motivated by traditional causes like flight, exile or work but targeting personal lifestyles (King 2002, 90) is even more recent, but has an apparent visibility particularly in some Western and Southern Mediterranean coastal towns (Nudralı and O’Reilly 2009:138)”. Turkey is different from the other destination countries in the southern Europe in aspect of cultural and religious characteristics thus it represents a unique destination because of this distinction. Thus it is of great importance to look at both the motivation and life-worlds of lifestyle migrants and the attitudes and opinions of local people on the “new residents” of their own neighbourhoods in order to follow the interaction, understand the social/cultural distance between the sides and perhaps, to predict possible tensions. This is important because there are signs about permanency of the European lifestyle migrants in Turkey.

EU citizens in Turkey either have residence permits from one year to five years or tourists visas for three months that they can renew. Their period of stay, migration motivations, social status, educational backgrounds, levels of integration with the host culture and life-worlds differ greatly (Kaiser 2010). Kaiser (2003) distinguishes different groups of EU citizens in Turkey. These groups include: (1) EU spouses of Turkish citizens (more than 95% of them are women), (2) descendants of this group, (3) retired EU citizens (settling and buying property along the “Turkish Sunbelt”), (4) alternative lifestyle seekers (settling along the Turkish Sunbelt or in large urban areas and belonging to the age group between 40–50 years old), (5) EU citizens of Turkish origin and (6) descendants of West European immigrants to Ottoman Empire. Among these groups, retired EU citizens and those looking for an alternative way of life, has more visibility in many international tourism destinations located on Mediterranean and Aegean coastal zone: For example Kuşadası and Didim in Aydın province; Bodrum, Marmaris, Fethiye in Muğla province; Alanya and Kemer in Antalya province – see Figure 1. These coastal tourism towns have changed into immigration destinations for different groups of EU citizens particularly from UK, Ireland, Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands and Nordic countries. This recent phenomenon in Turkey has been subject to many researches within the concepts such as “retirement migration” (Balkır and Kirkulak 2009), “older migrants” (Bahar et al. 2009) or “lifestyle migration” (Nudralı 2007). The results of researches on Turkish coastal towns indicate that Mediterranean climate, inexpensive
property and low life expenses play role as main pull factors. Perceived positive characteristics of Turkish society -like hospitality- are also important among the pull factors.

EU citizens in Mediterranean and Aegean Turkey have become more visible parallel to the development of international tourism industry and real estate sales to the foreigners especially from the early 2000s. However international tourism has an important place in Turkish economy today, it had a slow development. In 1950, Turkey received only 29,000 foreign visitors. One million visitors arrived in the early 1970s, 5,4 million in 1990 and more than 10 million in 2000. Tourism reached to a mass scale in 2010 with nearly 29 million foreign visitors. EU countries have been the most important tourism market for the Turkish tourism. Half of the total number of the foreign visitors to Turkey, for example, was from Europe-OECD countries in 2010.

Real estate acquisition of foreigners in Turkey, on the other hand, had not attracted much attention before the validity of legal regulations made in 2003 which provided convenience for the foreigners to acquire real estate in Turkey, in accordance with the EU adaptation process. Before this regulation in 2003, the total number of the properties acquired by foreigners was a bit more than 37,000 and it increased 16% by mid-2004; %15 by mid-2005 and 13% by mid-2006. In 2012, there are 116,455 real estate purchased by the foreigners in Turkey which belong to 125,000 people from different countries, predominantly from the EU (91,6%) (Table 1). Turkey was announced to be Europe’s most attractive residential property market in 2010 (Global Property Market, 2010) but Turkish Statistical Institute recently declared that during the first quarter of 2012, property sales in general showed a decrease of 20%. However, if the regional characteristics are considered, it must be noted that Muğla- Aydın region for example, which is quite popular among EU citizens to purchase property, witnessed an increase of 27%.

Today, citizens of UK and Germany are the first two leading groups in Turkey in aspect of property ownership, nearly 36,000 and 30,000 people respectively. Dutch citizens, for example, are also relatively large group (nearly 6000 people) however 5% of them are Turkish origin. A high concentration of foreign real estate owners is observed especially on the southern and southwest coastal zone of Turkey where the important international tourism destinations are also located. Metropolitan cities such as Istanbul, İzmir or the capital city Ankara are among the other important areas where foreigners acquire property. %65 of the foreigners purchased properties in Antalya province, which has shown a considerable development in tourism sector especially since the mid-80s (see Figure 1, Figure 2, Table 1 and Table 2).
Figure 1: Major lifestyle migration destinations in Turkey and provincial distribution of foreign property owners (%)

Figure 2: Provincial distribution of the foreign property owners in Turkey in mid-2012 (%)

Table 1: Origin countries of the foreign property owners in Turkey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of persons</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU + non-EU Schengen countries</td>
<td>114,320</td>
<td>91.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>5,415</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA + Canada</td>
<td>1,380</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia and New Zealand</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries</td>
<td>3,401</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>124,833</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Shares of foreign property owners from EU and non-EU Schengen countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of persons</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>35,825</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>29,219</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordic countries*</td>
<td>14,655</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>10,830</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>6,816</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>5,907</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>4,470</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>3,478</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1,189</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,931</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>114,320</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Iceland
Though previous researches on lifestyle/tourism-related migration in the European context mostly focused on Spain, Portugal, Italy, Malta and Greece; in the recent years, the profile of lifestyle migrants and their motivations in case of Turkey has been studied in many coastal tourism towns along the Aegean and Mediterranean Turkey.

A research conducted on the Aegean coastal zone of Turkey in three coastal towns, Marmaris, Kuşadası and Ayvalık (Mutluer and Südaş 2012), showed that the pull factors for lifestyle migrants are similar with the other destination countries along the Mediterranean coast as well as other destinations in Turkey: Mediterranean climate and inexpensive cost of living are quite important. Along with these factors, perceived positive characteristics of Turkish society referred as “an informal way of life”, “hospitality” and “friendliness” seem to be much more important as a pull factor than the social characteristic in the other destination countries. There are also differences between lifestyle migration destinations. In Ayvalık, which was historically a Greek town in Western Turkey, cultural attractions, such as the historical town centre, are given high importance and the migrants in Ayvalık have a relatively higher level of education and income. Kuşadası, which is a mass coastal tourism destination, is the destination where the retired immigrants have a relatively high share while in Marmaris, migrants are younger and working and marriage seem to be more important pull factors in migration decision than in the other two districts.

The migration towards Aegean coast of Turkey are predominantly from UK, however there is a flow of other Europeans as well. While western coastal destinations are more popular for the Britons and the Irish, Alanya on the Mediterranean coast was called “the little Germany in Turkey” as a result of the large German population. Today in Alanya, there is also a high concentration of Nordic migrants (35% of the total foreign property purchasers was from Nordic countries in 2008). It must also be noted that all of the migrants are not retirees. The shares of the retired migrants are changing from one destination to another as some researches indicate: In Alanya (Südaş and Mutluer 2006), the share of retired migrants was 38%, on the other hand researches on the lifestyle migrants in Marmaris (Özbek 2008, Südaş 2011) report that the share of the retired is between 30-35%.

Immigrants in the coastal towns have visible cultural impacts in the areas where they settle. For instance, English, German or Dutch speaking immigrants change the urban space through creating linguistic landscapes. Spatial elements such as real estate advertisements, shop signs, Christian cemeteries and names of socializing places such as bars and cafeterias in languages different than Turkish are the reflections of immigrant identity on the urban landscape (Photos).
Besides the cultural impact on the urban landscape, lifestyle migrants create their own social network through legal associations. German and Danish citizens have their associations in Alanya while there is another German association in Kemer, a district of Antalya province. Religious demand of the immigrants resulted in cultural impacts such as the Christian cemeteries in Marmaris and Alanya. In Fethiye, a destination in southern Muğla, public celebration of Christmas was performed through a Christmas market set up by the European community (D.H.A. 2012).

Due to the German population in Alanya, a pork butcher serves in the city since 2001 (BİANET, 2001) and it is also possible to see German bakeries in the city centres of Marmaris and Alanya. Because a crematorium has been a demand among European immigrants in Turkey for a long time; a company that offers funeral services for foreigners in the Mediterranean province of Antalya has submitted a proposal to the local metropolitan municipality to construct a crematorium to process the remains of foreigners in the area (HÜRRİYET DAILY NEWS, 2012).

Non-Turkish local newspapers are another means of social networking and communication. *The Post* in Marmaris, *Ege Eye* in Kuşadası and *The Didymian* in Didim have been significant local newspapers in English on the Aegean coast. On the other hand, as a result of the German speaking population- local newspapers in German language like *Alanya Bote* and *Prima Türkei* are distributed in cities such as Kemer, Side, Belek Manavgat, Antalya and Alanya which are located on the Mediterranean coast.

Educational demands of the children of younger lifestyle migrants are also visible in some destinations. For example, foreign children attend the local primary school in Didim and a private college in Alanya started a special Turkish language program for the foreign students in 2011 (T.A.K. 2012).

As Nudralı and O’Reilly (2009:137) point out “Turkey provides a unique context for intra-European migration given its economic, political and religious distinctiveness, its ambivalence in the context of EU enlargement and its geographical location between East and West.” When considered the cultural differences between the host community and the incomers, it is also significant to explore the relationship between two sides however such academic studies are few (for example Nudralı 2007, Toprak 2009). Toprak (2009) explored the views of local people on EU citizens migrating to coastal Antalya. According to the findings, 61% of the locals do not prefer to settle in the neighbourhoods where foreigners are concentrated. 63% do not find real estate
acquisition of foreigners in Turkey convenient. Associations founded by the foreign population are found useless (43%) or very inconvenient (25%) by the local people.

How to interpret these findings? This question is especially important when we consider the permanency of the new residents of the Turkish coasts reported in many studies. More than half of the Europeans live in some Aegean destinations during the whole year while in Alanya, this share was more than 40% in 2005. Interviews with some Europeans may give a detailed frame about how they perceive Turkey: A UK citizen, who is a previous visitor of Turkey and currently living in Ayvalık, says there are two circumstances that might force her to leave Turkey; one would be the reason of ill health. The other would be a dreadful political revolution that makes her life impossible in Turkey. And adds “I don’t think but, if it happens then I would probably have to leave. I hope to live and die here.” A retired migrant from Didim, who tends to spend the whole year in Turkey says: “We live in Turkey and we want to have citizenship. I get angry when people say ‘in England we would do this and that’. We have chosen to live in Turkey and this is our home” (Bayır and Shah 2012). A 36 year-old Briton from Marmaris, talking about his future plans which do not include leaving Turkey, focuses on educational needs of his children: No plans to leave Turkey at the moment, we are very happy here. When we start to have children we would have to think about the schooling, but at present from what I have seen, the kids grow up much nicer than their British counterparts”. These words also indicate the medical and educational demands of the migrants which may possibly increase in the future. Thus, the increasing European population along the Aegean and Mediterranean Turkey should not be seen only as the “temporary guests” enjoying sun and sea or only an economic input through the real estate acquisition and a contribution for the local economies. Social-cultural interaction with the host culture should be explored and the needs of this relatively new population must be considered.

REFERENCES


TOPRAK, Z. 2009. “Yabancı Emekli Yerleşiklerin Yerelde Kamusal Hayata Katılım İstekliliği ve Yerel Halkla İlişkileri: Antalya İçin Bir Yaklaşım” [Willingness of Foreign Retired Residents to Participate in Local Public Life and Relationship within the Local Community: Example of Antalya, Turkey] Yönetim Bilimleri Dergisi 7(2): 99-137 (In Turkish with an abstract in English)
WEB SOURCES


Photo 1: Alanya on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey, one of the most attractive coastal towns for the EU citizens
Kuşadası, a street landscape

Alanya, the Christian cemetry
Alanya, a German restaurant

Marmaris, a German bakery
Alanya, a pork butcher
Alanya, Dutch advertisement
Kuşadası, a real estate office in the city centre

Alanya, a multi-lingual real estate advertising.

All of the photographs were taken by the author.