Identity Politics as an Expression of European Citizenship Practice: Participation of Transnational Migrants in Local Political Conflicts

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Political Participation of Retired Migrants in Southern Spain and the Emergence of Local Political Conflicts

The increasing migration of retired northern Europeans to the coastal regions of the Mediterranean, mainly to Spain, is a remarkable phenomenon within the context of European integration. In contrast to traditional labour migrants, the key protagonists of these movements can be characterised as (mostly) affluent senior citizens, who migrate/move in order to fulfill a leisure- and outdoor-oriented lifestyle after retirement. Within the last decade, seasonal and temporary movements (to spend autumn and winter in Southern Europe) have been widely replaced by permanent migrations. Different statistical analyses give evidence that the coastal areas of Spain are the most important destination, followed by the French Riviera, Portuguese Algarve and Italian Tuscany (Casado-Díaz et al. 2004; Warnes 2001). Taking into account the various reasons for migration in Europe, this "amenity migration" of senior EU residents is a highly important and rapidly increasing practical experience of a borderless Europe.

Recent discussions concerning migration processes of (senior) EU residents have mainly been concerned with approaching the transnational social conditions of this specific type of migration (Ackers/Dwyer 2002; Casado-Diaz et al. 2004; O'Reilly 2000; Warnes et al. 2004). More than 750,000 of such migrants, coming principally from the EU-15 member states, are currently registered with coastal municipalities throughout Spain, and more than two thirds of them are within age of retirement (INE 2007). But the statistical data available do not track the record: Breuer (2003: 45) and Huber (2005: 328) confirm that a realistic estimation of northern European expatriates at least doubles the official data. Including the seasonal migrants, an estimated figure of two and a half to three million foreign senior residents live in Spain. Throughout Spain, many municipalities, especially in coastal areas of Andalusia, Valencia, the Baleares and the Canaries, count large numbers of foreign residents, in some case exceeding by far the figure for native inhabitants. These villages and towns are prototypes for wider areas of the Mediterranean coast and can be characterised as an important "social laboratory" for both the empirical study of senior migrations and a theoretically focused research approach regarding the outcome of the European political integration on a local and regional sphere. Given the fact that many of these "European residents", as they name themselves, belong to the economic elite and were successful professionals, they count on powerful tools, know-how and resources to integrate themselves and exercise leadership in a variety of areas within local politics, ranging from the formal representation in local parliaments to all kinds of informal participation settings, especially in areas or topics related to urban and regional planning (Durán 2004).

In an attempt to regulate urban development, the Spanish region of Valencia adopted a complex planning law in 1994 (the *LRAU*[1]). The stated purpose of the law was principally to give the municipalities in larger urban centres the legal authority to force reluctant, normally large-scale landowners to cede portions of their property, with the aim of providing space for low-cost housing (Sánchez de Madariaga 2003: 92pp). In summary, the law enables local authorities to change the assignment of land from agricultural use (where following national laws the construction of two-storey-houses on plots of at least 10.000 square metres is possible) to urbanizable land, whenever a developer wishes this. The promoters do not necessarily have to buy the future building plots, because a system of forced concessions lead to the situation where the private owner has to pay the investor all urbanisation and infrastructure costs deriving from urbanisation and concede additionally up to two thirds of the total area to the developer (Soriano/Romero 2004). However, in the last few years, it has become increasingly evident that the land laws, coupled with the expropriation powers, have been widely misused. Local councils are under pressure from promoters and developers who exploit the legal system to obtain land at low cost in order to build expensive holiday and retirement accommodation and get substantial economic returns. Many thousands of mainly foreign residents suffer under the consequences of this law. In 2002, some of the victims of the land law, decided to fight for their rights and founded an NGO named "*Abusos Urbanísticos No*[2]" with the aim of, via active political participation, achieving a moratorium against development plans in several municipalities and also in the region as a whole. As local and regional authorities did not show any cooperation or sympathy, they decided to de-localise this primarily local conflict and organised petitions directed at the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Court of Human Rights. The embeddedness of several members of the NGO in important networks of the transnational political elite led to success, and the queries were answered with frequent visits and reports by the Commission and the Parliament. A team of activists took up the challenge to fight for property rights as a full-time job and were able to convince several delegations from the European Union of the failures of the law. By vote of the Euro-Parliament on December 13, 2005, infringement proceedings against Spain were opened, and as a final consequence, a new law replaced the former Valencian land use law in 2006.

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[1] LRAU is the Spanish abbreviation for "Ley Reguladora de la Actividad Urbanística".

[2] This Spanish name means "No to urbanistic abuses".

The case against the LRAU planning legislation and its local applications does not only show the political involvement and power of transnational elite migrants in political conflicts. European residents in Southern Spain were able to de-territorialize this local conflict and involve supranational institutions usually unknown in local conflicts, for instance making use of the formalised power of European institutions by exercising European citizenship rights. But the most important aspect, which will guide the conceptual discussion in this text is based on the fact that the foreign residents also managed to invent a commonly shared identity which is mainly based on "European" principles. Thereby, this paper will focus on the question of how identities are strategically used within the political conflict dealing with the local application of the land-use regulations. It will provide a conceptual analysis of the role of "European" identity politics and identification processes within this political conflict and discuss how identity politics can be evaluated as a practical resource in this specific and transnational struggle.

The Shifting Spaces of Citizenship and the Decisive Role of Identity Politics

Elite migrants, such as the amenity-seekers in Southern Europe, are often referred to as a living example of the embodiment of a new transnational world (Favell 2003: 397pp). In this new world, citizens increasingly escape from some of the constraints of the old national systems. Different authors integrate this observation in the conceptualisation of what is named transnational social spaces or transnational social formations (Faist 2000; Smith/Guarnizo 1998). Within the European Union, the ratification and implementation of the Treaty of Maastricht did not only expand the freedom of residence, mobility and labour, but also established new forms of citizenship which contest the common understanding of national citizenship (Wiener 1998: 7pp). Citizenship rights such as the possibility to vote and to be a candidate in municipal elections do not exclusively relate to a static national concept any longer (Day/Shaw 2002), but include political participation in different societal settings. As a consequence, authors such as Mitchell (2003: 397p) believe in a rising process of national de-consolidation and defend the de-territorialisation of democratic participation.

As Jackson et al. (2004) emphasise, in a globalising world many social relations are increasingly stretched out across the borders of nation states. Consequently, urban politics and social movements are also becoming more and more transnational. Following their main ideas concerning the geographies of transnationalism, three different perspectives on transnational studies (from "above", "below" and "between") can be differentiated. While studies of transnationalism "from above" are associated with the impact of supranational political institutions, transnationalism "from below" is commonly understood as the incorporation of different forms of local resistance, e.g. via grassroots activism (Jackson et al. 2004: 8p). According to Smith (2001), transnationalism "from between" is regarded as a permanently reconstructed product of political and cultural practices, involving transformations of individual and daily (political) practices. This approach can be evaluated as an effort to conceptualize the transformations within a global world, without the necessity to refer to Luhmann's conceptualisations of "world society" (Luhmann 1991). Despite its inspiring analysis of social systems, recently interpreted within the framework of geography and geographical migration studies (Pott 2005; Goeke 2007), adaptations of system theory still mainly focus on macro-scales and a systemic perspective. As discussed in the introduction to this volume, process-oriented approaches, which concentrate on the analysis of individual constructions such as this contribution, may better fit into a conceptualisation which is based on the broader debate on transnationalism.

In this regard, recent discussions from Global City research and political theory concentrate on the changing role of the national state in a transnational world (cf. Barnett 2003; Davidson 2000; Low 2004; Vandenberg 2000). One of the central arguments is that the growing importance of transnational European economic, cultural and political interaction is leading to a post-national era with the subsequent formation of a European civil society through daily practices and routines (Finke/Knodt 2005: 11pp). Post-national power positions include different forms of governance, ranging from the local up to the transnational levels, which may contest institutionalised links between social power positions and the nation state (Held 1995; Mann 1993). Cosmopolitan individuals like elite (senior) migrants with a wide variety of lifestyles, political ideas and options, are the prototypes of a new "transnational citizen", disintegrate nationally-confined organisational spheres, both from "above" and from the "bottom", and establish new forms of flexible social control and power (Faist 1998).

Lepofsky and Fraser (2003: 127) argue that the rising flexibility in practical uses of citizenship goes hand in hand with a transformation of its theoretical conception. Post-modern or post-national citizenship includes more than just only a collection of rights, but is also a powerful discursive mechanism which articulates identities and which has shifted from a given status to being a performative act. This idea leads to the question discussed in this paper of how citizenship may be important for claiming the rights to the city, the production of space and the participation in (local) political conflicts about urban space. According to Rose (2001: 474), citizenship is currently shifting from being a possession towards being a capacity of "citizenship practice" (Wiener 1998: 7). Considering citizenship as a practice, it includes the connotation of increasing flexibility in identity. Postnational or European citizenship as an expression of the rising role of Europe also causes potential problems with identities, which traditionally were discussed as bound to the invented community of a nation (Anderson 2006).

In a transnational world with multiple migration patterns, cultural and political identities are a commonly shared social construction which is constantly destabilised (Hall 1996). All social subjects are constituted through cultural hybridisation (Bhabha 1996). At the same time meanwhile they refer to a strategic use of essential cultural concepts, e.g. within political resistance. Essentialisation with the use of empty signifiers is a necessity within hegemonic relations, in order to establish the possibility of representation (Mouffe 2002). Stuart Hall (1997) offers two possible reactions of identity politics in response to the weakening of the national state. One possible response regresses towards a defensive and aggressive nationalism, which searches for the establishment of new social power relations through the essentialisation of cultural identities. The other way of dealing with the menace of loss of stable identities implies an integrative action with the strategic application of new cultural patterns. Identity politics, by means of contesting traditional identification processes, is the base for social and political innovation. This is despite the fact that all political actions, for instance, require temporary fixations of our flexible identities (Krauß 2001: 21pp). Within political activities in a globalised environment with a wide variety of transnational ties and meanings, questions of cultural identity play an increasing role in political action. Identity politics, as representations of social and spatial meanings, offer the opportunity for political coalitions and a commonly shared basis for action in political conflicts.

The Social Construction of Europe and European Identities

Following Benedict Anderson (2006: 15pp), each community with a larger scope than face-to-face groups, has to be conceptualised as an imagined community. That is the reason why communities should not be differentiated by their authenticity but rather through the hegemonic way in how they are imagined (Wodak et al. 1998). In contrast to many European nation states, Europe can be neither clearly recognised – nor can its geographical borders even be defined. As a consequence, the hegemonic discourse about Europe and European identity is still widely contested (Quenzel 2005: 5pp). Different authors argue that this aspect contains the problem of Europe, as a discursive product without complete national functions (Wiener 1998: 8pp). Different and partly exclusive dimensions and ideas about Europe and its identity are being negotiated within the media and the political system and involve a variety of controversial debates. Authors such as Nissen (2006: 155pp) understand the European identity as the collective identity of EU citizens in relation to the Union institutions, while Loth (2002: 93pp.) interprets European identity as one flexible possibility of identification based on shared traditions. In his conceptualisation of Europe, Bach (2000) refers mainly to the bureaucratic elite located in the administrative and political institutions and provides a conceptual analysis of the transnational networks of administrative restructuring processes resulting from the proliferation of European institutions. Puntscher Riekmann and Wodak (2003) propose the theoretical argument that any politcies which refer to Europe and its identity, simply make strategic use of the same theoretical constructions as used in national discourses. From this point of view, European identity is just one layer between many others, which can be used to unify any kind of community. For the political utility of collective representations of (European) identities, as is the case in the political participation of foreigners in Southern Spain, two aspects should be considered: First, collective identities cannot be thought of without the existing power relations and can be interpreted as expression of or protest against them. Secondly, identities should be evaluated as politically motivated engagement and representation, which regularly build on a commonly shared emotional basis and which activate the integration of the group itself.

Any construction of European identities always contains positive and negative aspects, as identity must always be thought of as the binary opposition of identity and difference. Every process of identification always comes back to an inscribed difference, which is constitutive of every positive statement. Following Stuart Hall (1996: 4), "identities are constructed through, not outside difference", which implies that any positive identity is only possible "through the relation to its Other". This theorem is deducted from Derrida's radical de-constructivism (Derrida 2004), political thoughts about social power (Laclau/Mouffe 1985) and feminist theory of Judith Butler (1990). It is also the basic starting point for the possible use of European identities in political conflicts such as those foreign residents are engaged in Southern Spain. In this context, Gudrun Quenzel (2005) offers an interesting overview of the different possibilities of Europeanness. Her contribution applies Stuart Halls' ideas of the constructive Other (1997: 223pp) in order to defend the position that Europe is constituted both through internal and external Others. Aspects, which derive from positive identity constructions such as "Civilisation and technical advancement", "Christendom", "European values" or "Aesthetic community always imply an inscribed difference to internal and external Others, who are marked as less or not European. These constructions establish the analytical framework for the empirical discussion of the strategic use of identity politics and "Europeanness" as the expression of a commonly shared identity in the conflict over land use and the expropriation powers of local authorities in Southern Spain.

Between Formal and Informal Forms of Political Participation: European Identities as a Practical Resource of (retired) Elite Migrants in Local Political Conflicts

A common hypothesis proposes that the recent strengthening of the European institutional frame, the increasing mobility of European citizens and the formal possibilities for transnational political participation within Europe develop automatically and result in European civil society. But different analyses of municipal data show, for instance, that the formal political participation of EU-citizens abroad is extremely low (Jacobs et al. 2004; Strudel 2004). Adrian Favell (2005), who conducted qualitative research on the political interests and involvement of highly mobile foreign professionals in London, Brussels and Amsterdam concludes that these "Eurostars" do not show no more major interest in the municipal voting rights granted to EU citizens, even if they are locally social active, possess social capital and have only minor language problems, than traditional labour migrants. Apparently, it is not the right to vote which encourages the political participation of foreigners. It seems instead that rather the symbolical signs and codes that control the access to local politics keep even foreigners with perfect language skills away from active interaction with the local political elites. In the words of Pierre Bourdieu, this exclusion means that the capital of cultural practices bound to the field of local politics are so restrictively controlled and monopolised by the traditional elites, that foreigners are discouraged from participating actively in political life abroad (Bourdieu 1989). Mahnig (2004: 35p) interprets this exclusion of migrants from political participation as a typical and systemic attitude of governmental structures and regimes. This poses the interesting question of why and how specific governance contexts give power to foreigners. Diehl (2002: 5pp) argues that within local politics, ethnicity may play a decisive role, although it is less relevant if it reflects symbolic, invented or even fictional ethnicity. If political integration follows ethnic topics and specific groups can identify the representation with shared cultural symbols, the establishment of ethnic motivations can be a successful way to gain influence in local politics.

Most of the ideas referred to are a helpful tool for the theoretical and empirical analysis of the political participation of foreign residents in the Mediterranean. But it is evident that other conditions also play a decisive role:

- In contrast to the centres of the European economy and administration such as London and Brussels which are a magnet for highly mobile urban professionals, the Mediterranean attracts mainly retired people who did not move as a step in their career, but came for the lifestyle maximisation.
- Elderly residents show a major interest in local and regional political questions, have more time to engage in local politics and count on knowledge and experience in organisational tasks. Age, gender and nationally

bound behaviours are important factors in the daily practice of political participation of foreign EU residents in the Mediterranean.

- Political participation is evaluated as a form of formal and informal social engagement abroad, especially in cases including "interpretation" between communities, e.g. via the application of language skills.
- National, regional and especially local governance regimes play a key role in the motivation for the participation of foreign residents. In cases when the residents disagree with political regimes and the way decisions are taken or communicated, they are highly interested in taking an active role in their municipality. This explains the high regional variation in exercising the right to vote in local elections held in Spain in 2003 and 2007 respectively.
- Given the fact that many of the "European residents", as the senior migrants in Spain call themselves, belong to the economic elite and were successful professionals, they count on powerful tools, know-how and resources to integrate and assume leadership in local politics, ranging from formal representation in local parliaments to all kinds of informal participation settings. Migrants from northern Europe have founded their own parties in many municipalities and are currently active politicians in an increasing number of local councils.

Within the Costa Blanca region, which is the "home zone" of political participation of retired EU foreigners in Spain and the protest against the regional planning regulation, there are about two dozen municipalities. In these municipalities where European residents have taken an active part in the formal political system, being elected local councillors and playing a major role in the local political decision making. Cultural aspects and identity politics subsequently emerge as part of this participation, as the following statement from a councillor in a village with a vast majority of foreign residents, mainly Germans, shows: "Yes, I told our *Alcalde*[3] once, when he said to me: 'Hey, you must learn better Spanish!' So I told him: 'No – you must first learn German, don't you? (laughs) You are here mayor of mainly Germans.'" (Wilfried R.)

Although the statement sounds ironical, it also expresses the councillor's own desire for a greater role in all questions regarding the representation of German citizens in his village. On the other hand, there are other examples where the formal political scene reacted to the threats of foreign political participation. In Teulada-Moraira, an elite beach resort of about 12,000 inhabitants with more than 70 per cent foreigners, a new locally based party put in place a policy of full political integration of foreigners. "Europe" as a daily practice was the strategy to achieve a shared vision of a hometown with multiple transnational social ties. The participation of foreigners in important positions of the local council (e.g. vice Mayor, Head of the Department of Finance, Head of the Department of

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[3] Alcalde is the Spanish word for Mayor.

Ecology) led to a win-win-situation for both social and the administrative life, while local conflicts were subsequently de-escalated, by using a common "European" identity: "Here we have a Europe in a pocket design, and especially this European idea has been realised here. Total integration, no? And we all are working here to improve our place to live, our region. What we wanted, was exactly this. We are a little Europe here." (Sylvia T.)

The statement cited shows how actors in local politics try to realize an integrative vision of future local development through recourse to a "European" vision, although expressed as a fairly vague idea. Identity politics explicitly using the notion of an empty signifier called "Europe", helped to establish a basis for the political integration of various foreign groups. By strategically using this empty concept of a European identity, every individual can imagine different aspects of how this concept may be filled within a context. But an important aim was to eliminate all conflicts between foreigners and the native population. The strategic use of "Europeanness" does not only mean symbolic participation of foreigners, but also leads to a re-definition of local development strategies. In contrast to other villages, the actors involved in the local governmental institutions recognised early the social dynamite that was behind the cited land law application and had established as early as the year 2001 a moratorium on all building permits. Within a participative process of a Local Agenda, which was held in six different European languages, different development lines for the municipality were established, mainly focusing on upgrading the local development by the proliferation of primarily high quality housing. As a consequence, since 2002, no cases of abuses related to the application the LRAU land law were reported in this village – a very different and striking situation as compared with the surrounding areas.

European Identities as a Practical Resource of Elite (Senior) Migrants in Local Political Conflicts: The Case of Parcent

Although many studies focus on the formal political involvement of foreign residents in European cities, it is the "informalisation" of the contribution of foreigners which emerges as a recent "key policy issue in European cities" (Fennema/Tillie 2004: 85). Authors such as Salzbrunn (2001) show that the expression of the political interests of migrants is not reflected in the common and formal modes of participation. Especially, the possibility of internet based media use (e.g. blogs), enables and de-locates new forms of participation and identity politics. But how does this informal political participation work in different contexts, what can be learnt from the conflict over the abuse of the land use regulations in Southern Spain, looking again at the role of "Europe" and "European identities" in the conflict?

As mentioned in the introduction, February 1, 2006 was an important date for the tens of thousands of signers of the petition that was presented by the NGO "*Abusos Urbanísticos No*" at the European Parliament. By this date, the new land use regulations had been applied in the region of Valencia and the former LRAU was replaced. But promoters and developers were able to convince, in more than 120 cases, the municipal authorities to authorize new development projects by granting building permits for more than 60.000 new houses, chiefly through parliamentary decisions taken in the last days of January 2006. Three of these highly disputed decisions took place in Parcent, conceding a construction company owned by the Spanish music star Julio Iglesias, the right to construct more than 1,800 houses on a highly attractive hillside outside the current village of only 900 inhabitants, a fairly disproportionate size for such tiny village. Following LRAU land law application, more than 50 (mainly foreign born) neighbours living currently within the development area and also about 35 (mainly native) landowners, producing citrus fruits in the valley mainly on small agricultural plots, received the official claim for paying high fees to the developer and lose important parts of their land. The following quotation from one of the interviews explains how the law worked on a "micro scale":

> "We had no letters, no notification, nothing, neither the Spanish landowners nor any of the mainly foreign owners of the 50 houses. We heard nothing. So, we pressed and got a meeting with the town hall, with the *alcaldesa*[4] and with the technical officer, Ignacio. In this meeting Ignacio, the architect, explained to us that this plan had been submitted on the LRAU. And he said, well, on the LRAU first of all, you will have to pay a contribution towards the infrastructure. And not just for my road, for my house. But as a proportion of the total area. So whatever the cost of the infrastructure is for the whole area, you must pay according to the size of your plot. And we asked him how much this might be. And he indicated with a shrug of his shoulders: Well, on a kind of rocky mountain side, a range of around about 75 Euros per m², is normal, you know. So, a very quick calculation: You know, I have got 1,500 m² here, that is gonna make a bill of over 100,000 Euros. Then he goes on to explain: On top of that, on the LRAU you must contribute...., all the landowners of the area, because the developer within the plan has to set aside 30% for public open space, for green space, a certain amount for public use, like a school or health centre or something. You must all contribute to that as well, as a proportion of the plot size. And that could be 30-40% of your plot. And I said, well, what is the use of me giving 300 meters in that corner of my garden, it is no use for anybody. And he said: No, no, not like that. But you have to pay if you want to keep it. So on top of the 100,000, I was gonna have to pay a lot of money to keep my own land. We protested, [...but], the mayor just shrugged and said: "*¡Es la ley!*"[5] – You understand Spanish? So we came away, very angry, very upset and the first thing we did was, get together, inform the residents." (Mark H.)

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[4] Spanish expression fort he mayoress of the village.

[5] The Spanish expression means: "This is the law!"

Threatened with significant economic damage and the annihilation of the physical environment, the neighbours decided to set up a locally organised protest movement in order to respond to the publication of the plans in late 2004. The protest strategies of the association can be divided into two phases: Until the decision of the local government, all protest was locally based and tried to stop the project by convincing politicians to vote against the plans. After the decision in favour of the plan, the conflict was strongly de-localised, organising juridical and political protest in the provincial capital Alicante, the capital of the Autonomous region of Valencia, the national capital Madrid and at the European institutions in Strasburg and Brussels. It was exactly the combination of carefully designed protest strategies with legal actions, which finally led in October 2006 to a decision of the Supreme Court in Valencia, stopping the plan due to a number of illegal aspects in the whole procedure.

The following analysis centres on the local conflict and the strategic use or construction of an array of "differences" as expression of identity politics within the struggle against the planned urbanisation of the local hillside. Despite the fact that the protest movement was organised by foreign European residents (mainly British citizens), they achieved a broad coalition with native inhabitants, including local farmers, environmental organisations and even a xenophobic movement of the nationalist regional party. The analytical aspects are derived from a series of interviews with local citizens, activists, and politicians and also consider information available in published newsletters, flyers, websites and newspaper articles. But the main arguments will be presented in the words of the leader of the local neighbourhood association. His interpretations and representational schemes are key elements for the development of this conflict, as it was him who was constantly negotiating with the potential investors and the local administration over many months.

All the arguments of the protest movement are based in a permanent process of identification, which has a typical pattern. Following Stuart Halls' perspectives on identity politics, it is important to consider that, within the discursive action, constructions of different elements of European identity are contextualised through the constitutive "Other" of the protest – which is mainly the coalition of municipal leaders and land developers. Following this perception, different identity politics – mainly centred in the dichotomy Europe vs. Spain:Valencia: Parcent – can be identified and will be discussed.

One central interpretation of this conflict, being highly representative of similar situations in other villages, takes into consideration the question of how democratic participation and the will of the inhabitants are respected. The reference frame is always analogous to this statement and implies aspects such as corruption and non-participatory democracy, comparing local authorities and political structures with the Other which can be labeled as "British":

"I thought that this was really nice, that you could walk up to the town hall and you could ask for information, you could meet the mayor walking in the street. And for the first year or so, you know, I met the mayor a couple of times and "*Hola Mark. Como estás? Ah, muy bien...*"[6] uh, and I thought, this is really nice. What a nice way to run a village. But of course once you get involved in something like this and you realize just how devious they are, how uh, undemocratic they are, you suddenly realize that actually, a lot of the problems here stems from the fact, that there are just so few people who run the council. When there is only four people against three people on the council, if those four people get together and decide on a particular course of action, or, as if some of those are corrupted in whatever way by developers or anything else, uh, then you suddenly find that, that democracy just doesn't exist at all." (Mark H.)

At this point and without mentioning any directly European aspect, it is clearly understandable that normative concepts of how democracy should work within Europe are implicitly engaged in the meaning of his statement. The prototypical situation of many small villages is reflected in the following statement of another foreign resident who is politically active in a local government.

"In this government with seven seats, we own four of them. That also means that I had to take my responsibility in participating in governing. And that was a desolation to be honest. Just because you became aware how poorly it was organised. How it is a matter of, uh, "be nice to friends and be hard to the other half". That's not my system. Democracy doesn't mean dictatorship of the majority. That's not my view. Democracy is not-, I always say it's not *la dictadura de los quatros*[7]. It's not fair. You need to listen to the others and really consider what they say and if they have better ideas, implement the better ideas but do not create another dictatorship." (Jan T.)

The expressions give clear hints that local politics in the region do not reflect what the self-identified group of European residents considers as proper democracy. The retired elite migrants, many of them with experience in local politics in their home countries, have clear ideas of the local failures due to their well established internal principles of how democracy should work:

"I retired from local government in Southeast London when I was 50 years old. I was part of the chief executive department of a big council in Southeast London. I studied law, though I wasn't a lawyer, I just studied law at university and then became an administrator really. And, I was very involved in the political processes. One of my jobs was to provide the services to the council for meetings, the committees and the council itself. I also did a lot of work on public consultations over new policies, new programs, part of my job was as head of public relations as well. So I was constantly familiar with organising meetings for the public, informing public, providing information to the pub-

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[6] Imitation of a prototypical situation, when meeting someone on the street, saying: "Hello Mark, how are you? Fine, everything okay?".

[7] In English, this statement means "the dictatorship of the four (governing politicians)".

> lic, dealing with the press, dealing with the media, all that kind of thing. So, I came with this background of understanding the way that democracy works. [...] When I came to Spain, I very quickly found that certainly in Parcent, and I suspect in a lot of the little villages, it doesn't work anything like that." (Mark H.)

The sequence from the biographical story shows two of his personal principles in relation to public administration: (i) confidence in the procedures of state action based in the laws and (ii) confidence in trustworthy public relations and participatory commitment at a local level. This normative concept of democracy, in the light of his professional career, is the interpretational basis for his valuation of the democratic system in Spain and explicitly in the village in question. His hegemonic normative point of view, his Londoner perspective, is loaded with aspects such as development versus backwardness and leads to a negative evaluation of everything which is different from his own cultural background – conceptualised as "British" and "European". The following statement develops this argument:

> "It is taking me a long time to realize and understand what goes on in a village like Parcent. But as someone coming from Britain and someone who used to work in local government in Britain, you bring with you a kind of European concept of democracy and fairness and consultation and honesty and trust with politicians and all of those. Even in Britain, Politicians aren't always a 100 per cent trustworthy. But when you deal with them here long enough, what you realize is, that you have to clear your mind of any ideas that you brought with you from England or Germany or Holland, wherever you might come from. And start thinking Spanish because they just don't accept or understand any of those principles." (Mark H.)

The culturally interpreted discrepancies that lie behind this interpretation lead to a wide essentialist point of view: (Political) values defined as typically British, Western European or cosmopolitan become the "European" standard and are used as the reference point for all criticism of the local politics. The argumentation is based on the superiority of his point of view and the resemblance between the British and European identities. The expression of his identity politics gain importance through the discursive unification he applies by combining the concept of "European democracy" with aspects such as fairness, honesty and trust within politics. In order to express his ideas of European identity, he refers to a spatially defined "core of Europe", formed by countries such as Britain, Germany or The Netherlands. This implies a location of Spain as the constitutive internal Other of his identity construction. Whoever comes to Spain, has to re-program his understanding of politics, because the usual "European" values do not work there. From the point of view discussed by the activists, the reason seems to be easy: Spaniards do not respect the European way of governing. This is his central argument for discursively excluding Spain from any kind of European identity and values. But where does he locate Spain and Spanish democracy?

> "The problems here stem not just from the political situation but from the structure of the council and the way these councils operate. In Britain, and I am sure it is the same in Europe, there is a separation of power, even in local government. There you have professional paid officers of the council. And then you have the politicians. The politicians take the policy decisions, but the officers operate the law and tell the politicians what they can and can't do within the law. What happens here is, that distinction doesn't exist at all. The mayor in the town hall and the councillors basically see themselves as the bosses of the offices. If an officer says, by law you really should be doing this, the mayor just says: Oh, we are not interested! Forget it, we are doing it this way! You know, I was often in this position with politicians in England, I would sit with the politicians and I would say: I don't give a damn, if you are the leader of the council, the mayor or anyone. I am the paid officer, I am telling you legally you cannot do that and you will not do it. But here, that doesn't exist. (…) The people in power run the town hall as if it was their own little empire. You know, the mayor is treated like a god-type figure. And it is almost as if Franco was still here." (Mark H.)

Following his reasoning, a central aspect of the deficiencies of the "non-European" Spanish democracy is concerned with the role of politicians and officers. He draws an image of the Spanish administration that indicates the lack of separation of powers such as established since the French revolution, trying to exclude again Spain from a supposed European way of governing. The image is one of the remarkable and essential differences in local politics between the village he lives in and his reference frame, which is the city council of Greater London. Beyond the absence of separation of powers, he describes an image of quasi-dictatorship and links this to "Spanish" political thinking and actuality that implies a belief in the absolute authority of the mayor as the local leader. He describes Spanish administration in a pitiful condition and links it to the dictatorial past of the country, when the mayor was installed by the central government. Again, this argument points to an essential European value, which is proper democracy. As not being fulfilled in the particular village government, he constructs an image of dictatorship in order to strip the local politicians of all possible moral legitimacy.

The examples quoted demonstrate that any use of identity politics within this local conflict takes three important dimensions into consideration: (i) the discursive construction of a commonly shared identity using "Europe" as the central positive identification, (ii) the discursive construction of Spanish politics as the internal Other which contests the positive identity through an inscribed difference and (iii) the discursive construction of a geographical representation of normative ideas through its location at the "core" of Europe, where Spain is excluded twice through the combination of cultural values with spatial aspects. This arrangement offers a highly coherent frame for the constitution of an interest group that acts on the local political scene.

Conclusion

The political conflicts over land use regulations in Southern Spain, analysed in this text, show the different meanings of transnational political action and the flexibility of belonging. Supranational institutions such as the European Parliament or the European Court of Human Rights, which represent new possibilities for an activation of transnational power structures in local conflicts within Europe, play a decisive role in the struggles against local politicians. Institutional power is accompanied by the array of citizenship rights granted to foreign residents in Spain as a result of the enlargement of the European Union. Rights to appeal at the higher European institutions as well as the right to an active and passive vote in local election, transform the legal starting point for any protest movements by European residents living abroad. It is only the legal framework, which constitutes European citizenship rights and allows for the de-localisation of the conflict over misuse of local planning laws. But it is important that, considering the political involvement and the activation of individuals, it is not the formal European frame that is considered as a major resource in identity politics. Although legal, the European institutions and possibilities for political participation are constantly applied, the central discursive references and the social construction of conflict strategies, however, regard European values as a practical resource to activate citizens and form pressure groups. These "European" identity politics play a decisive role in all aspects concerning social mobilisation in relation to the conflict.

Regarding broader theoretical discussions of the dissemination of "transnational" values, lifestyles or political culture within different migration settings, the conclusions remain less optimistic: It is important to consider that, with exception of the discussion presented in the elite beach resort Teulada-Moraira, all analysed identity politics are not developing towards any kind of transnational political culture. Moreover, the political activism can be evaluated primarily as protest against traditional local politics in Spanish municipalities by means of the organisation of a lobby group. This group makes use of the transnational power relations established by the EU legal framework and the interconnection of the political activists with the EU framework, but they do not extend to other spheres of public life. Any transnationalism regarded in this chapter is highly selective: While the personal sphere and daily organisation of the amenity migrants is clearly located within each language group (e.g. British, Dutch or German), "transnational spaces" occur or are organised around certain, well established values of civil society and political organisation. But the example also shows that discursive mechanisms including "Europe" are one important reference scheme primarily that arise in conflicts and include the "education" of the regional social and political setting, emphasising a "colonial" aspect of European structures and values.

In consequence, transnational political practices arise both around official structures and concepts of any transnationally interpreted identities and identification. They set up a flexible framework for the discussion of European citizenship which can be evaluated as a practical resource or capacity of certain subjects. Both the daily practice of "Europe" and the conceptual discussion within social sciences assign to provide European identity a prominent place in order to respond to flexible conceptualisations of citizenship and identities. Such approaches and empirical conclusions coincide with some of the principal ideas of transnationalism theories, in this case primarily in the political sphere, and express the necessity of the transnational framework in order to re-consider the practical implications of European citizenship which was observed in political struggles.

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