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NORDIC JOURNAL OF MIGRATION RESEARCH

Special Issue Article • DOI: 10.2478/njmr-2019-0013 NJMR • 9(2) • 2019 • 161-177

'HEALING YOUNG HEARTS': *emotional and psychosocial dimensions of well-being among young–adult Spanish migrants in the London region*

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Received 15 May 2018; Accepted 08 February 2019

Abstract

Based on 20 in-depth interviews with young Spaniards aged 20–35 years in the London region, this article explores the linked processes of migration, adaptation, and young–adult life transitions from the perspective of psychosocial well-being. Although most young Spaniards have moved for economic reasons, they also have personal and emotional motivations. The article explores factors that mediated their well-being experiences in the destination setting, such as the role of social networks and the achievement of their aspirations. Aspirations were not only material, in the form of a steady and higher income, but also factors such as language improvement, reuniting with a partner or friend, and being independent from their family. The findings of the paper contribute new insights into the factors that condition the relationship between migration and psychosocial well-being during the transition of young people to adulthood.

Keywords

well-being • youth migration • adaptation • Spain • London

Introduction

The freedom to move and live without obstruction anywhere in the European Union (EU) has been one of the greatest achievements of the EU. Free movement has allowed EU citizens to move for different reasons, including education and employment opportunities, lifestyle, retirement, or to be with a partner (Benton and Petrovic 2013). However, the global economic crisis beginning in 2008 altered the migration behaviour of many, especially those moving from economically weaker EU countries, such as Spain, to less affected countries in Northern Europe.

The crisis provides part of the macrostructural context behind the evidence presented in this paper, which looks at the migration motivations, adaptation processes, and well-being of young Spaniards in the United Kingdom. Their emigration after the economic crisis was not surprising; the unemployment rate of those aged <25 years in Spain rose to a peak of 55% in 2013. Although the rate dropped to 44% by 2016, this remains far above the level of 18% before the crisis (Eurostat 2016).

The United Kingdom has been the main destination for young Spaniards who migrated after the economic crisis (Gonzalez-Ferrer 2013; INJUVE 2014). These migrants mostly belong to middle-class families; a majority have completed tertiary education (Jendrissek 2016; Nijhoff & Gordano 2017; Pumares 2017). The scale of the arrivals can be reflected in National Insurance Number (NINo) registrations published by the Department of Work and Pensions (2017), which show annual rates in excess of 40,000 per year over the period of 2013–2017.

Existing literature on the recent migration of young Spaniards to the UK has focused on their economic motivations (Rubio 2013; INJUVE 2014; Dominguez-Mujica, Diaz-Hernandez & Parreño-Castellano 2016; Jendrissek 2016; Pumares 2017). Very few studies have explored the adaptation process of these migrants, their sense of belonging, and the factors that mediate their psychosocial well-being (Elgorriaga, Ibabe & Arnoso 2016; Vallejo-Martin 2017). This paper seeks to address this gap. Although we acknowledge that most Spaniards have moved for economic reasons, our main aim is to explore the personal and emotional dimensions of this migration. We tackle the following research question: in the context of the post-2008 Spanish economic crisis, how can the linked processes of migration, adaptation to life in the UK, and young–adult life transitions be understood from the perspective of psychosocial well-being? After an initial methodological section, the article includes a theoretical discussion on the relationship between migration and psychosocial well-being. Then, it analyses young–adult life transitions and the adaptation process of the participant sample in the UK. Finally, it explores the aspects of psychosocial well-being and ill-being that characterise their migration experience, paying attention to differences between three subsample groups – students, high-skilled workers, and lower-skilled employees. The conclusion highlights key findings, summarises similarities and differences across the threefold participant sample, and suggests future lines of research.

Data and methods

Between November 2015 and March 2016, 20 semistructured interviews with Spanish migrants were conducted in London and Brighton, a coastal city in the South of England, as part of the 'YMOBILITY' project on new European youth migrations.[1] The sample was stratified into three categories as follows: high-skilled, low-skilled, and students. This is important since the recent literature on Spanish migration cited above has mainly focused on the experience of high-skilled migrants, overlooking the experiences of other groups. The participants were aged 20–35 years; most had been in the UK for several years, only

three had arrived within the previous year. An approximate gender balance across all three categories was achieved.

Recruitment of participants was done through three different means as follows: the authors' social networks; online media, mainly Facebook; and frequenting places that were known for their employment of Spaniards, mainly cafes, stores, and restaurants. Interviews were in Spanish and varied in length between 50 minutes and 1 hour 20 minutes. Following a life-course perspective (Kulu & Milewski 2007), the interviews chronicled the context leading up to migration, and what happened after, with questions grouped around family background, migration motivations, employment, life satisfaction, feelings of belonging, social life, and future plans. To explore the complex notion of belonging, we asked questions such as 'where do you feel you most belong?' and 'where is home from you?', not only prompting on different geographical spaces such as city, region, country of origin and country of destination but also enquiring about specific ethnic or other group identification, any sense of European identity, or being a 'citizen of the world'. Interviews followed standard ethical procedure: obtaining each participant's written or oral consent, permission to be recorded etc. The recordings were transcribed and translated to English for analysis. Names are pseudonyms.

Understanding the linkages between migration and psychosocial well-being

Previous studies have highlighted the role of well-being in the migration process from a range of perspectives, including psychology (Bhugra 2004; Bak-Klimek *et al*. 2015), education (Dodge *et al*. 2012), and the interdisciplinary fields of migration studies and development studies (Wright 2012; Vathi 2017). A parallel but closely interconnected discourse arises from the so-called 'emotional turn' in migration studies (Gray 2008; Boccagni & Baldassar 2015; Svašek 2010), within which we also draw attention to the notion of 'emotional capital' (Cottingham 2016). Nevertheless, the literature is still unclear on how to define, understand, and measure well-being (Dodge *et al*. 2012). For example, Wright (2012) considered that human well-being consists of three interconnected dimensions as follows: material (living standards and income), perceptual or subjective (identity issues, norms, and psychological states), and relational (personal and social relationships). Similarly, the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2013) identifies career, social connections, income, personal economics, and community as the main factors affecting well-being. The IOM's approach demonstrates how the macrostructural context of the Spanish economic crisis is enmeshed with individual experiences. Clearly, the well-being of migrants is multidimensional – not only related to incomes and material items but also comprising a strong personal, emotional dimension, including the migrant's relationships with others in the new setting (Wright 2012; Boccagni & Baldassar 2015; Vathi 2017). Indeed, the literature suggests that aspects of subjective well-being, such as achievement of migration expectations, social networks, and personal attitudes such as optimism, resilience, or confidence, can ultimately have a

stronger effect on well-being than objective factors such as income or sociodemographic characteristics (Bak-Klimek *et al*. 2015; Elgorriaga, Ibabe & Arnoso 2016).

Nevertheless, issues of *psychosocial* well-being are frequently ignored in migration studies. We take Vathi's (2017: 5) definition and understand psychosocial well-being as 'a person-centred concept that emphasises the value of interactions and social and emotional consonance, and individual experience'. Vathi thereby includes emotions as a fundamentally constitutive part of psychosocial well-being, as is further argued by authors driving the 'emotional turn'. Indeed, in the opinion of Boccagni and Baldassar (2015: 77), 'failing to factor in emotions leaves out at least half the story and risks over-simplified analysis'. Along with Cottingham (2016: 451), we view emotional capital as a form of embodied cultural capital that involves 'emotion-specific, trans-situational resources that individuals activate in distinct fields', including the 'trans-situational field' of migration.

The period of adaptation in the receiving country is of great importance for migrants as this stage may exacerbate or alleviate feelings of stress and well-being, including the extent to which they feel they belong in the host society. The adaptation process requires learning the unwritten norms of the new settings and incorporating these with the identity of the migrant and his or her changing expectations (Huot, Dodson & Rudman 2014). Exploring emotions and well-being during the adaptation period provides a more multidimensional understanding of the integration of the migrant in the host country, including their sense of belonging there (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015). Previous research has identified the various factors that influence the adaptation period, including cultural aspects of the host country, language knowledge, religion, economic hardship, educational level, occupational trajectory, perceived discrimination, fulfilment of migration expectations, and social support (see, *inter alia*, Mähönen, Leinonen & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2013; Bak-Klimek *et al*. 2015; Elgorriaga, Ibabe & Arnoso 2016). Adaptation and belonging might also depend on the difference between the two cultures and willingness of the individual to change (Bhugra 2004). Characteristics of the migrant, such as age, gender, legal status, ethnicity, and their multiple intersections, also play an important role in how individuals experience their psychosocial well-being during the different stages of migration (Bhugra 2004; Vathi 2017).

Age is particularly relevant, but age is a plastic concept; less about a given figure and more about change and transition. To date, few studies have focused on youth–adult transitions in a migratory context. If young people are more likely to flexibly adapt to their new settings, this probably means that they are more easily able to negotiate their emotional sense of belonging in their destinations. Belonging can be understood as 'a feeling of being at home', where migrants build an attachment to their new settings over time (Huot, Dodson & Rudman 2014). Therefore, the linkages between youth migration and psychosocial well-being cannot be explored separately from feelings of adaptation and belonging. Nevertheless, defining where 'home' is turns out to be one of the fundamental existential predicaments of the overall migration experience (Rapport 1998). As we will show, the linkages between migration and psychosocial well-being are non-linear for migrants and difficult to predict. They are experienced differently according to migrants' individual characteristics and are conditioned not only by context and circumstances but

also by structural factors that policy-makers in both sending and receiving countries should address if they are interested in enhancing the psychosocial well-being of their populations.

Furthermore, young people's aspirations to enhance their experiences in the fields of education and work, and thus their successful transition to adulthood, are what frequently drive their migration decisions. The role of the migration project in the achievement of these aspirations can be explained by life-course theory (Kulu & Milewski 2007). This approach advocates the utility of examining life trajectories of individuals to reveal the meaning individuals make of their lives in their movements between various statuses and roles at various times. The decision to migrate for our participants was framed by different life milestones that were important in their transition from youth to adulthood, such as their desire to reunite with a partner, or to achieve economic independence, emotional stability, or career and personal satisfaction. Their ability to achieve (or not) these expectations affected positively or negatively their psychosocial well-being in the UK.

Young–adult life transitions and life in the UK

Echoing the findings of other studies on Spanish migration to the UK cited earlier, our participants vividly described the worsening of their economic and living conditions in Spain after the recession. Precarious jobs, unpaid internships, or long periods of unemployment drove their decision to migrate, supported by the stories of friends or relatives who improved their economic situation in the UK. Migration was the result of a collective feeling of national failure (Dominguez-Mujica, Diaz-Hernandez & Parreño-Castellano 2016; Jendrissek 2016). Yet, participants migrated to the UK for multiple interconnected reasons beyond income. The search for a higher quality of life, geographical proximity, joining a partner, the availability of social networks, or the desire to escape from difficult personal situations were all part of individuals' decision-making. Lucia, a high-skilled migrant who left her job as marketing consultant, was a typical case:

> I had a partner at that time but we broke up and I didn't have anything fixed in Barcelona; I could work from home or from any other place. I had a very good friend who was living in England and she encouraged me to come here…it was a bit of a crazy decision, it was not planned at all, it was like 'now or never', so I packed my suitcase and I arrived… I didn't come with a specific reason like trying to find a job or anything like that, it was only the need to make a change, and that I wanted to have a different experience by living here … (29, high-skilled, London, 2 years in the UK)

Lucia's account demonstrates that age, together with her high-skilled, 'single' status, creates a more flexible state of life, and so she is able to take individualistic, spontaneous decisions, without having to take into consideration the needs of others, such as a spouse or children. Her statement demonstrates the emplacement of migration in young–adult transitions and its intrinsic function for the development of a project of self-fulfilment, as another research on youth migration to the UK has indicated (King *et al.* 2014). One common view in the

narratives of participants was that time spent in the UK was not only seen as a means to avoid the recession in Spain but also as an opportunity to actively invest in the acquisition of human capital such as work experience, enrolment in post-graduate education, and English language courses (see also Rubio 2013; Dominguez-Mujica, Diaz-Hernandez & Parreño-Castellano 2016; Jendrissek 2016; Pumares 2017). However, as is demonstrated by the abovementioned quote, migration was as much about 'making a change', moving on in life, and 'healing the heart' after a relationship break-up. Thus, migration was perceived as a 'rite of passage' to adulthood in part not only to avoid economic constraints but also to experience how it is to live abroad and to achieve personal growth as a newly single person. This fits in with other research studies on Spanish youth who migrated to Germany, also in the context of the economic crisis (Glorius 2016), and with research on Spanish 'crisis migration' to Norway, where migrants' emplacement in the Norwegian context leads to a process of 'grounding' and personal maturation (Bygnes & Erdal 2017).

One of the more dramatic cases of personal, emotional factors behind young Spaniards' decision-making is Andres, whose long narrative extract below combines the structural dimension of unemployment with some tragic personal and family circumstances:

> For me, it was the personal situation more than anything… I started to go out with my girlfriend, the only long-term relationship I ever had, when I was 18 years old… she was my best friend since we were 12… We split up when I was 28. My father was battling cancer for some years… and he had to stop working in July 2011; 15 days later he was in a wheelchair… At that time I did not have a job so I decided to help my mother look after him… He was a very big person, so you can imagine what it was like lifting him from the bed… to give him a bath… you need physical strength… My girlfriend did not understand, and it was over… I broke up with her in September 2011, and my dad died in December… I was devastated, destroyed… Then I started to recover slowly… and I heard about a Leonardo scholarship from the local town council… I applied to go to Dublin as my first choice but they sent me to Lisbon for three-four months… and when I returned my mother was really bad so I decided to help her recover and cheer her up… but after some months I saw there was no way I could do that… she only wanted to continue with her mourning, and we were arguing all the time.
>
> […]
>
> I had a friend here in England, a friend from high school, and he said 'come here'… and so I had this opportunity to find a job in whatever I could do, and I found a job on the third day… I started work, found a room, started to meet people, and now here I am (32, low-skilled, Brighton, 2 years in the UK).

With regard to the adaptation process, participants highlighted certain personality characteristics that facilitated this stage, including becoming more open-minded (non-

judgemental, tolerant), adventurous and persevering, being detached from home, and being more ambitious than their peers who stayed in Spain 'passing the time' living with their parents. One factor that materially helped the process of adaptation was the availability of family financial support. Approximately half the participants (including both students and working migrants) received 'reverse remittances' (see also Nijhoff & Gordano 2017) from their parents to pay for their initial expenses until they settled down or to see them through periods of unemployment. In the case of students, some continued receiving regular parental support to cover their costs. This emphasises the transitional nature of migration. Young Spaniards aspired to transit to adulthood through migration; yet many still depended on their parents to achieve this. While this gave them a feeling of security in their process of adaptation, those who no longer needed to ask for money reported feeling more emotionally stable and independent.

Spaniards from all three categories mentioned feelings of missing home, the food and weather, the differences between the Spanish and English culture, and initial difficulties with the language as the main difficulties during their adaptation period. Those who expressed feelings of attachment to their new settings also described having fewer emotional ties to Spain and included those who were not satisfied with their lives in Spain and perceived more advantages than disadvantages in their migration decision. However, perceptions of psychosocial well-being and belonging during the adaptation stage differed between the three categories. Students described having a less difficult time. Although they often struggled to adapt to the new academic system, their host universities supported them to find accommodation, improve the language, meet new people, find part-time jobs, and adjust to the culture. PhD student Cristina described her experience as follows:

> I have been very supported by the university so it has been easy. I have had the luck that all the British people that I have met are very open-minded and have never judged me because I'm a migrant… Also as a student there are no big responsibilities, I am living here but I am living like a student so I haven't felt the complete weight of the English culture because we are in the university with people from all over the world and it has been fun (28, student, London, 4 years in the UK).

In the case of Spaniards who migrated to the UK for work purposes, the difficulties to find a job and suitable accommodation – especially for those living in London – were the most frequently mentioned factors affecting their adaptation and well-being. High-skilled migrants were in a better position than low-skilled because they usually had previous migration experience, either in the UK or elsewhere, which helped them to adapt to their new settings. They reported having already developed important skills such as confidence, adaptability to new situations, ability to communicate with people from different cultures, resilience, and an 'instinct of surviving' in a new country. These types of skills resonate with the notion of emotional capital, 'a tripartite concept composed of emotion-based knowledge, management skills, and capacities to feel that links self-processes and resources to group membership and social location' (Cottingham 2016: 452). Likewise, most of them had savings and a reasonable level of English that helped them with their initial

expenses until they found a job, accommodation, and settled down in their destinations: findings that are consonant with those of Elgorriaga, Ibabe & Arnoso (2016) in their study of high-skilled Spaniards in the UK.

However, most high-skilled participants took low-status jobs on arrival, mainly in the hospitality sector. Although these jobs enabled them to pay initial expenses and were considered a step towards more qualified jobs, participants felt frustrated, dissatisfied, and sometimes ashamed. This was the case of Gabriela, a law graduate who took a waitressing job on her arrival:

> Before I came I thought that, as I was young and with a degree, with a good level of English, and open-minded, it was going to be easier. But I couldn't find a job. I sent CVs to Law firms and I didn't succeed, so I thought 'I have to find any kind of job' and I found a job as a waitress. My parents didn't take it very well because they thought 'you are a lawyer but you work as a waitress in London, come back to Spain'. It was like… not humiliating but, you know, I had a bad time because I thought I could do better than what I was doing (27, high-skilled, London, 3 years in the UK).

This finding confirms the results of Vallejo-Martin (2017) who argued that high-skilled Spanish migrants working in jobs below their qualifications experience higher levels of 'ill-being', including emotional exhaustion, pessimism, and lower perceptions of professional value. Not meeting initial employment aspirations can lead to feelings of failure and frustration (Bhugra 2004). But in most cases this was a temporary phase until a better job was found, usually as a result of an improved fluency in English and a better understanding of how the job recruitment system works (Jendrissek 2016).

The low-skilled migrants reported speaking little English and depending more on their personality traits, especially being sociable and adaptable to new situations. Most of the low-skilled migrants arrived with no or very little savings, but soon found jobs, mainly in the hospitality sector. Low-skilled migrants depended heavily on other Spaniards during their arrival in order to open bank accounts, find jobs and accommodation, as Andres demonstrated that:

> I came here and spoke some English but did not know how to apply for a job or to ask for a National Insurance number, so my friend had to call because I was nervous… Also, to find a job he told me to go to the Pier [a major tourist attraction on Brighton beach] so I started working at the Pier and I had a very good time, started to meet more Spaniards, to have a life, especially at night [laughs]. There I met my housemates who are now my family.

These findings corroborate literature that suggests that social networks – especially those with co-ethnics – are significant predictors of high levels of well-being because they help migrants to acquire new resources and enhance their chances of coping successfully in difficult situations (Bak-Klimek *et al.* 2015; Mähönen, Leinonen & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2013). Although social networks were more significant for low-skilled Spaniards, they also

played a crucial role during the adaptation process of the two other categories. As noted by Dominguez-Mujica, Diaz-Hernandez & Parreño-Castellano (2016), the social networks of Spaniards with other Spaniards are strong, which explains a smoother process of adaptation to living in the host country, even if it potentially delays deep social contacts with members of the 'native' population.[2] Hence the process of integration and belonging is two-dimensional: in the first instance, becoming a part of the local Spanish community; in a second moment, and more challenging, developing a fuller sense of belonging to the host society.

Aspects of psychosocial well-being and ill-being: progress and independence vs. disappointments and loneliness

Our findings emphasise the importance of the achievement of expectations in the youth–adult transition for the well-being of Spaniards. Migration was the means to achieve the aspirations that they could not fulfil in Spain, especially at the time of economic crisis there. When expectations were achieved or surpassed, satisfaction with life in the UK increased. For example, leaving the house of their parents, moving in with their partners, or achieving economic independence, all made participants feel good and in a better situation than their peers in Spain. Alejandra explained that:

> I feel good here because I am independent economically, I live in a flat with my partner and we are totally independent and do whatever we want, we have economic independence. [Through migrating] I could achieve an independent life, to be able to leave my parents' nest, to live by myself (25, high-skilled, Brighton, 3 years in the UK)

The migration experience was satisfying on an individual level because participants felt they became more mature and responsible. They enjoyed new experiences that they could not have had at home, they left their comfort zone, increased their self-confidence, and 'grew up' as persons. Note how many times Alejandra says the word 'independent' in the abovementioned quote, whereas in Spain she could not afford to live by herself as she was only working part-time. By contrast, when migration expectations were not achieved or plans did not go as expected, participants expressed ill-being. One example comes from Ines, who was unemployed in Spain and wants to work in the film industry:

> Right now I feel completely unsatisfied… the problem is that I am trying to find a job. I have gained work experience as a fitness instructor but I think it's time now to jump into film in a more stable way. My social life is zero in general… I also don't have stable accommodation because the prices are extremely high, so I share a house, something that I'm not used to (31, low-skilled, London, 4 years in the UK).

Time will tell if Ines will achieve her 'dream job' but, with only a high-school diploma and still imperfect English, her chances in this extremely competitive sector are probably slim.

Our findings suggest that, when informants perceived that they were on the road to achieving their expectations, the migration project is temporally extended. These feelings are accompanied by increased confidence and contemplation of new goals vital to their transitions to adulthood. Andres described this in the following way:

> I consider I am working on my future here and all the efforts I am making will return to me at some future time… Here you feel more valued, more useful; it depends on the life-project one has, but in my case my goal now is to have a family. In Spain my future was zero, here I have a different perspective, I have new goals… Here my work is a tool to make money so I can bring someone into the world, having a more stable life…

While achievement of aspirations led to feelings of independence, social networks were still important for young migrants. Family separation, language barriers, long-distance relationships, and the inability to establish solid friendships created feelings of loneliness. Friends and relatives from Spain who were resident in the UK or who visited regularly contributed to the well-being of the participants because they provided emotional support and reduced feelings of isolation. This too echoes the findings of other studies (King *et al*. 2014; Palmer 2012). Although our participants interacted and socialised with other nationalities, most considered that their closest friends were Spaniards because there was no language or cultural barrier. Likewise, social media such as Facebook groups were an important tool that enabled them to exchange information, find jobs, ask questions, and get support when needed. Miriam, who came as an Erasmus student and worked part-time as shop assistant, narrated that:

> There are many people like me who are constantly looking at that group on Facebook. For example, if you want to buy something that you need for your everyday life and you don't know where, you just ask and someone tells you, or if you have problems with the Underground, food, the weather, we say it there; if you have any problem that group is always going to be there and someone can help you, or if one day you want to have a coffee because you feel lonely, many people in that group are very helpful… (23, student, London, 8 months in the UK)

On another level, participants also recognised the downsides of migration and the factors that generated feelings of ill-being. Several emphasised high living costs. Although they all perceived that their economic situation improved, they did not necessarily consider that their quality of life was better. Health was another concern. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the UK's National Health Service and preferred to return to Spain if they needed medical attention, as Gabriela explained that:

> I was in shock because I saw it as very third world, very old; here I had never felt like a migrant until I got sick because you don't know where to go…then, this is not my country, they don't speak my language, I don't know how to say what is my problem… So in health topics here I don't feel comfortable, I don't trust them, I don't know which

> doctor is good and which one is not, which hospital is good and so on. So I prefer that if there is anything I need, I will always go to Spain.

Comparing students, higher and lower skilled workers

Overall, achievement of aspirations and feelings of belonging through social networks contributed to well-being, whereas high living costs, perceived failure of achievement, and feelings of vulnerability contributed to ill-being. However, experiences of well-being and ill-being differed between the three migrant categories. In these cases, 'skill' appears as a qualitative and graduated variable affecting the attainment of well-being, even if the categorisation of our sample into higher and lower skilled implies a dichotomous formulation.

Students were the group that expressed most satisfaction with their life and migration experience. They valued the opportunity to study in the UK at internationally renowned universities, and they reported acquiring new skills that they would have not learned in Spain, such as writing essays, delivering presentations, or conducting their own research. Students were more institutionally supported and were in a better position to improve their language skills and to establish new friendships because their universities provided them with the required spaces. They were less stressed with their financial situation because most of them had scholarships or were supported by their parents. Most of the student participants were not contemplating an immediate return to Spain after their studies because they saw more job opportunities and possibilities to achieve their goals in the UK. We quote again from Miriam:

> I don't see myself at all returning to Spain because I would be living with my parents again without a job and I don't want to contemplate that possibility, I want to be independent.... I think I have better opportunities here than in Spain, so I am going to find a job that allows me to live, even if it's not my area, and meanwhile I will look for better opportunities.

Miriam's example reinforces the idea that moving abroad contributes to the transition of young people to a stage of more mature adulthood where economic independence and the development of a professional career are highly valued.

In the case of high-skilled Spaniards, the improvement of material and employment conditions were the key areas that positively influenced their well-being. This was the case of Julian who found a job in an environmental consultancy in London after his MSc in the UK: note that for him it was not the higher salary *per se* which was important, but the opportunities this gave for his passion for travelling.

> The job part is what I most value here... the salaries in Spain are not like here... In my case, I can do things that probably in Spain I wouldn't do, such as travelling, I like

> travelling a lot, and I can allow myself to travel when I want, with some limits, but I don't have to worry whether if I can afford it or not (31, high-skilled, London, 7 years in the UK).

If in general high-skilled Spaniards considered that their material and job conditions improved, they did not describe their situation as luxurious (*cf.* Nijhoff & Gordano 2017). High-skilled migrants also highlighted their satisfaction with the workplace culture in the UK and their ability to grow professionally. They valued highly the experience of working not only with British people but also with colleagues from different countries; they could discuss a raise, get continuous feedback, and have a more equal relationship with their superiors. Although some high-skilled participants felt that they were under-rewarded compared to their British colleagues, on a broader front, they appreciated that they were improving their English and their knowledge, which would benefit them if they decided to migrate elsewhere or to return to Spain.

In the case of low-skilled Spaniards, most worked in the hospitality sector. Many were on insecure contracts, paid the minimum wage, and often worked more than eight hours a day or had more than one job to support their living costs. They experienced more economic difficulties than skilled migrants due to their lower salaries and they acknowledged that this was also due to their having arrived in the UK with minimal or no English. The experience of Julieta, who came to Brighton to improve her English and aimed to find a job as make-up artist, illustrates some of the typical circumstances of low-skilled migrants:

> My salary depends on how many hours I work, so each week I have let's say 200 pounds and with that I can pay my accommodation and certain stuff, but if I don't work for a week I can't pay my accommodation, I can't pay the bus. I had to leave the English language school because I couldn't pay for it anymore, so… now my English got stuck and I feel bad … (22, low-skilled, Brighton, 6 months in the UK).

Despite the unfavourable working conditions of low-skilled informants, they reported their life satisfaction in the UK as better than in Spain because their employment and material conditions improved. Ines, despite the dissatisfaction she reported earlier, highlights this improving relationship:

> If I had stayed in Spain I think my income would be zero or minimum salary, with no possibilities to improve, because that's what happens in Spain, you don't have chances to do better, to progress… So in London, I see it like having all the advantages, an opportunity to work, to pay rent, a job that enables me to pay that. I have my own life whereas in Spain I had to get support from my parents, but now I am free, I rely on myself and I can do whatever I want. If I can go somewhere and can afford it, I just go…I have control of my life; in Spain it was impossible.

Low-skilled migrants also considered that they were acquiring new skills, including 'soft' social skills, or learning more about the hospitality sector. Like their high-skilled

counterparts, they also appreciated that they were improving their English and felt this would increase their employment opportunities, both in the UK and back in Spain.

Conclusion

Moving beyond the importance of objective and material aspects of well-being, this paper has underlined the importance of the subjective and emotional spheres that shape the psychosocial well-being of young migrants in their transition to adulthood. We have done this by empirically examining three categories of Spanish migrants to London and Brighton: students, high-skilled, and low-skilled. In the case of high-skilled migrants and students, we included the trajectories of Spanish people who studied in the UK, as well as those who studied in Spain; those who completed internships and stayed to study; and those who migrated to study with the intention to stay and work.

The Spanish economic crisis emerged as an important factor influencing the initial decision-making of our participants. Nevertheless, this was not the only push factor, and London and Brighton were attractive destinations for multiple reasons beyond the economic and professional opportunities that they offer. Migration was perceived as a 'rite of passage' for participants, enabling them to achieve goals that were considered important in their young–adult transitions such as their desire to achieve personal and economic independence, to live with their partners, to escape from difficult personal situations, to study, to learn English, to live new experiences in new places, and to develop better career opportunities. Cultural factors were also part of the migration decision, as King *et al.* (2014) found in the case of other European youths – Germans, Italians and Latvians – living in London. Spaniards perceived their places of origin as traditional and closed-minded, whereas London and Brighton were cosmopolitan, multicultural, and offered enjoyable social and cultural events.

We also provided empirical evidence on the linked processes of adaptation and belonging of Spaniards in the UK. Participants faced challenges during their migration including feelings of loneliness, adjusting to the way of life, food, weather, and the language. Nevertheless, other factors facilitated their adaptation, especially the importance of social networks with other Spaniards and the availability (despite some ambivalent feelings) of reverse remittances.

However, the process of adaptation and perceptions of psychosocial well-being differed between the three categories of migrants. Students described a generally easy adaptation process, due to the support that they received from their universities. The evidence of the high-skilled and low-skilled migrants suggests that the social resources of migrants matter during the adaptation process. The adaptation of high-skilled migrants was facilitated by their previous migration experiences, knowledge of English, and availability of savings to cover initial expenses. Nevertheless, most of them had to work at least initially in low-status jobs that were rationalised as a step towards better-paid and qualified jobs, but that affected in the meantime their psychosocial well-being, as they felt frustrated, dissatisfied,

and sometimes ashamed. Low-skilled migrants faced greater challenges in their quest for well-being. They arrived with little savings, few or no English skills, and depended more on their Spanish networks for their survival.

Another sphere explored in the interviews were Spaniards' perceptions of psychosocial well-being and ill-being. One key finding is the importance placed on the achievement of migration expectations linked to youth–adult transitions as a factor influencing psychosocial well-being. Against this, high living costs and health concerns detracted from participants' well-being. Once again, social networks with other Spaniards played an important role. Previous studies have stressed the importance of social networks for Spanish to migrate (Glorius 2016; Roca & Martín-Díaz 2017), but none of them have explored their value for psychosocial well-being in the destination, where they offer emotional support, reduced feelings of loneliness and stress, and opportunities for a social life.

The significance of our findings for migration studies are the following. First, our study resonates with the emerging literature on the synergies between migration, emotions, and psychosocial well-being (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015; Svasek 2010; Vathi 2017; Wright 2012). Our findings complement previous research that tended to stress the overriding importance of economic and employment expectations as the decisive factors of well-being. We have shown that without job satisfaction, or at the very least a decent salary to enable both survival and the achievement of other, non-work objectives (such as travel in the quoted cases of Julian and Ines), it is difficult to attain that sense of psychosocial well-being which is not just a stable state but also an ongoing process towards betterment in the future. Nevertheless, our findings also suggest that although both well-being spheres – the economic-material and the subjective-emotional – have an influence on each other, one does not necessarily guarantee the other. For example, increased incomes generate improved material satisfaction, but some of our participants suffered feelings of loneliness and vulnerability. On the other hand, the purely emotional pay-offs from migration – which we called 'emotional capital' – can result in enhanced well-being if 'hearts are healed' through the relational aspects of the move, either reuniting with a partner and achieving independence from parental constraints or seeking solace in escape from a psychologically damaging situation. The existence of emotional capital among migrants is a novel finding from our research and a new analytical category to be added to the 'forms of capital' discussed by Bourdieu (1986), among others.

Finally, it is necessary to point out that our interviews took place before the Brexit referendum. Research on how and to what extent Brexit is influencing the psychosocial well-being of young migrants would contribute to our understanding of the effects of such geo-political structural factors on migration strategies and aspirations for the future.[3] While most of our participants aimed to stay in the UK for the time being, Brexit might well have changed future intentions. For example, our findings have shown that many Spaniards feel vulnerable in the UK because of feelings of loneliness, doubts about the health system, and precarious labour conditions. Brexit, the anti-migrant discourse surrounding it, and the resulting legal uncertainly regarding EU citizens in the UK are probably exacerbating these feelings.

Notes

1. The YMOBILITY project ('Youth Mobility: Maximising Opportunities for Individuals, Labour Markets and Regions in Europe') is a programme of joint research funded by Horizon 2020 across the three years 2015–2018. It is coordinated by the University of Rome 'La Sapienza' and consists of nine partner countries: UK, Germany, Sweden, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Romania, Latvia, and Slovakia. For more details, see www.ymobility.eu.
2. Beyond the Spanish literature, other studies also discuss the different kinds and levels of social support that young migrants from the same ethnic group provide to each other in the UK, such as Poles (White & Ryan 2008), Italians (Scotto 2015), Germans (Mueller 2015), and migrants from the Baltic states and other post-socialist countries (Lulle & Jurkane-Hobein 2017).
3. Other outputs from the YMOBILITY project are examining the disruptive effects of Brexit on the lives of EU migrants in the UK: see Lulle, Moroşanu & King (2018).

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