



## **Brexit Brits Abroad Podcast**

### **Episode 29: BREXIT, MOBILITY AND UNCERTAINTY IN THE LIVES OF YOUNGER BRITISH CITIZENS IN SPAIN**

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#### ***About the episode***

When we think about British populations in Spain, our attention is most often drawn to the stereotypical images circulated by the media: pensioners living their retirement in the sun. But what about younger UK citizens living in Spain? What does Brexit mean for the terms on which they live their lives? Terms framed not so much by settlement, but by the ability to move; where Spain is home for today, but perhaps not for tomorrow.

This episode of the podcast focuses on the lives of these younger Britons living in southern Spain as Michaela [MB] welcomes Mike Danby [MD] into the studio to discuss the latest Brexit Brits Abroad report '[Talking Brexit with 18-35 year-old UK citizens living in Southern Spain](#)'. Unsettling understandings of migration as a permanent one-off move, and talking about how Mike and his interviewees navigate the changing demands of the European labour market, these migrants' stories highlight how Brexit is just one more challenge in their lives.

You can download this episode of the podcast at <http://brexitbritsabroad.libsyn.com/brexit-mobility-and-uncertainty-in-the-lives-of-younger-british-citizens-in-spain>

#### ***Transcript***

**MB Welcome back to the Brexit Brits Abroad podcast. I'm Dr Michaela Benson, a reader in sociology at Goldsmith's University of London and the research lead for a UK in a Changing Europe funded project that's all about what Brexit means for UK citizens living in the EU 27. If you're a regular listener to the podcast you'll know that one of the messages that we've been really keen to communicate is around the diversity of the British population living in the EU 27 and the likely diverse outcomes of Brexit for the terms on which they live their lives. We've also been threading this through the design of the project, trying to recruit people that you might not necessarily think about when you think about British populations who live in Europe, so through the work that Chantelle has been doing to recruit people of colour to the project and to find out about their experiences both of migration and settlement but also how they feel about Brexit and how that may or may not differ from their white British compatriots,**

but we've also been looking through the research that we've been doing in France and Spain in particular to diversify those populations in terms of age and to make sure that we get some representation, some younger voices into the research, and it was with that in mind that I approached Mike Danby who'd been one of my students over the last few years at Goldsmiths, to conduct a small piece of research for us into the lives of younger British citizens who were at that time living in Granada which is where he had moved to after he graduated. I'd asked him specifically to speak with 18 to 35 year olds and he managed to conduct 22 interviews, as you'll hear from our discussion that wasn't always as straightforward as it has been in some of the other areas of the research, but these were really fascinating interviews, and I think that what's really clear from the discussions that we've been having and from the forthcoming report that he and Karen have co-authored is the sense to which we might need to unsettle our understandings of migration, simply when we're looking at this younger population that he's been working with, many of whom work on quite temporary contracts in Spain, then we might need to think again about the relationship between migration and settlement and the fact that quite a lot of our understandings of migration seem to assume that populations are likely to become settled in the places that they've moved to. What do I mean by that? Well you'll see as the discussion between the two of us unfolds, but simply there are younger British populations and probably some not so young British populations for whom freedom of movement has meant being highly mobile around Europe and although when we think of the highly mobile or we think of elites quite often, or those working in elite professions or highly skilled professions, actually there are also other people who are relying on being highly mobile to follow labour opportunities or to try out different places and these are the people who might not have the types of resources that we would associate with elite professions, so putting their voices back into the conversation about Brexit and its impact on British citizens who live and work in the EU 27 is a really important intervention, particularly at this moment of time when we're thinking about free movement and what that means to people who are using it. I started my conversation with Mike by asking him to explain how it was that he came to move to Granada.

MD I first moved to Spain when I think I was 21, back in 2008, and worked as an English teaching so first and foremost my move back to Spain was kind of a solution to the thing of like you finish uni and you don't know what to do so I kind of thought well don't panic too much, go back to what you were doing before and things will kind of hopefully work themselves out.

**MB So that's when you went back last year rather than in 2008.**

MD Yes, so that's when, so I just finished uni last year and then ended up speaking to you about this project so basically that kind of fell into place

nicely and you said that you were doing this project which sounded really interesting and I was already interested in migration between Britain and Spain.

**MB Why were you in Spain, you weren't just in Spain for the project were you.**

MD Yeah. Firstly I was going to move to Granada to start doing an Erasmus plus internship and I was working, I did do that for a month actually, I started working there in a social centre working with people at risk of social exclusion and then I later dropped that to focus entirely on the project and also teaching English.

**MB So how, I mean that's quite a different story already isn't it because now you're back in the UK, you've just come back, so you were there for quite a short period of time in Spain, relative to what people might think when they think about people who move to Spain, but in that time, did you come across other people like you? In respect to people who were perhaps trying it out for a little while, perhaps, you know, being there for a short period of time.**

MD Oh yeah most certainly so like quite a few people, and some of the respondents that I met have become quite good friends and some of them already have moved and are not living in Spain or Granada, some are living, working here in the summer, teaching English and plan to stay here, others are, one of them's working in Butlins on the coast, another's working on a tour ship, so there was a lot of people that were kind of definitely doing temporary things. I'll be moving back in September, for various reasons my time in Spain was quite chaotic, I came back for Christmas and then back, been back for three months so yeah there were definitely people, I would guess that people tended to be more stable and they were there for at least like teaching English this year, whereas I didn't completely have that, I didn't have a contract for that year, kind of for example for English teachers that tends to be like you know at least that you're going to be working until June. Others for example, John, one of the people I spoke to, his contract, what he speaks about in the interview is that his plans didn't really go any further than January because that's when his contract ended, and so now he's living in a different area of Spain doing a different job so lots of people were living that kind of, knowing what they were doing where they were living for a specific amount of time.

**MB Yes, so they weren't necessarily doing lots and lots of future planning or not necessarily telling you oh I'm settled here for X number of years, so it was more this is the job that I've got right now and this is the thing that determines why I live in this place.**

MD Yeah definitely. There were a few exceptions to that, the people that had been there longer or working on specific projects but more than half of, I think two thirds of the people I spoke to were in their first year of being

there so there was definitely an element of testing it out, quite a lot of people mentioned the fact that they'd come there specifically because of if they didn't come now maybe they wouldn't be able to in the future, that was quite a big narrative as well.

**MB I've just realised that we haven't told people what you were doing, who you were talking to, perhaps you ought to introduce a little bit who those people were that we asked you to seek out.**

MD The people that I was speaking to were primarily the interest was probing the diversity of the British citizens that we're speaking to in Europe for a focus on 18 to 35 year olds so yeah that's who I was speaking to primarily in Granada but also round 5 or 6 in Seville as well, and they worked in a range of different employment sectors, there were a lot of English teachers, there were people working in tourism, there was even a professional circus artist, buskers, students as well, people doing internships, that type of thing. Quite a lot of people were post uni, like spending their post uni year doing that.

**MB People who were in a position where for whatever reason they were not firmly located in the labour market yet and might be trying different things out while they could.**

MD Yeah definitely, for example one young man was, hadn't been to university but was very wary of taking on the debt and didn't want to jump into it and had decided to do that, then there was on the other side older people who might have had problems, some people had been due to cutbacks had lost their jobs and had decided to have a complete career change and try something new given that they had stopped work.

**MB That's quite a common story, I don't think it's one that lots of people are aware of but one of the factors that can influence people's decision to leave the UK for example is if they lose their job in the UK because it seems to provide some kind of moment where you might explore another possibility and you might go to another country, so that's something that I've found in my work in France particularly, although I'm sure that it's quite common in other parts of Europe as well, when the opportunities there in the UK seem to be more limited than people seek others of course I suppose Brexit is also interplaying with that from the point of view of people starting to question whether they might be able to take up that opportunity at a later date.**

MD Yeah definitely, I think there's always that sort of catalyst moment that some people will talk about in terms of moving to wherever it might be.

**MB So you've managed to speak to 22 people and I think that you also did some interviews in Seville, around Seville, as well as in Granada so this image of younger people is already complicating what most people might think of as British populations in Spain who in the popular imagination, and it's certainly not something that we sign up**

**to as a project in believing but in the popular imagining British people who live in Spain tend to be old age pensioners, living on the coast for example, when actually it turns out that the statistics demonstrate that although Spain does have a higher proportion of retirees than some of the other European countries that number doesn't exceed 33% I don't think, so we're already still talking about population of working age and under within that British population which is at about 66% of the population so it's really really appropriate that we start to talk about who those people might be, and what they might be doing. Why do you think it's important to include the stories of these younger people within a study of British people abroad?**

MD Well it's important to include them in the conversation because they're often a group that are marginalised both in the sort of public imaginary of British people living in Spain but also in politics in general I guess, particularly in these circumstances about who's the, you know, British in Spain and British citizens in, across Europe feel that their voices are being ignored and I think it's specific, it's quite different for younger people who might feel sort of doubly ignored, very distant from politics, sometimes, that's a generalisation because some people were also involved in campaigning against the leave vote and such.

**MB One of the things that struck me when I was in France was the fact that in order to find those voices of younger people, in order to find those younger people who've migrated, you actually need to be on the ground because they're not the people who regularly come forward when you say that you're looking at a study of British people living in Europe and I think that the reasons, and I don't know whether you agree with this but I think that the reasons why that's the case is because in shaping a study around the idea of being British abroad, and in trying recruit with particular types of networks, there are some people who aren't included in those networks, quite often because they're actually quite well integrated into local labour markets, or socially integrated into the local environment, I imagine for example that a lot of the people that you spoke with were actually involved, you know, had Spanish friends as much as they had, probably more than they had British friends, so it's actually quite tricky to find them and yet their voices are quite important because as we'll go on to discuss later on, their experiences are quite different, their experiences of freedom of movement are quite different often to many of the more settled populations for example.**

MD Yes, yes certainly that's exactly what I was thinking when you asked your question was that I'm sure that my research differed massively from other elements of this project in that it wasn't at all easy to find my target population so at the start I was going out to every language exchange, I was going to British pubs, and it really wasn't easy to initially find people, I think

it was a case of like when you're waiting for a bus it doesn't arrive as well, since then I found more people and after a while obviously I realised where, where I was more likely to find British people but it definitely, and even from my own experience of living in Spain it was a completely different experience from this idea of the populations that Karen studied where there's whole areas which are very very, there's a strong British presence with British shops, Granada and other urban areas in Spain simply aren't like that a lot of the time so as you say a lot of the time they are more integrated and are just one of many nationalities living in these cities.

**MB I think that's, it sounds much more similar to the work that I've done in France in many ways where actually you know yes there might be, there might be connections between British people who live in the area but you've first of all got to find the people who have the connections, and then you find people because it's not that people are all living co-located in one place, which happens in some parts of Europe, there are British populations who live all together, but much, finding populations who are dispersed because of their motivations of being there or because they don't necessarily gravitate towards just people who are British like them.**

MD Quite often it's the opposite, it's a bit of a sort of badge of honour that oh I don't have any British friends.

**MB The number of times I've heard that from British people who live abroad, and I think that what that shows more than anything else is to do with how they want to demonstrate, or feel that they need to demonstrate that they are integrated into the local life, that they're not, they're not those people who are living in one country and not orienting themselves towards that country and towards the local people who live there so, I mean obviously one of the things that you will have been speaking to those people that you spoke with about, is about Brexit. I think from looking at what you've written for the report, from listening to some of those interviews that you conducted, that there's something quite specific about how those people felt about Brexit or how they've reacted to it. It seems to have a different intonation to some of the other interviews we've been doing, particularly with the kind of more older established populations in those places. Why don't you tell me a little bit about what they were, what they were saying.**

MD I guess the first point kind of leads in from the previous question that even from the recruitment process it wasn't like the type of responses that people have been jumping to speak and tell their stories and such, that just wasn't the case. There was a few, a few people who had that type of reaction but more generally it was kind of a vague intrigue about speaking about their story of coming to Spain and such but there was few people that felt really passionate about talking about Brexit, so that was, that was one of the differences.

**MB A little bit more similar to what Chantelle's been finding when she's been speaking with people of colour that they're not, they're not necessarily, they're quite difficult people to get hold of because they're not, they don't necessarily want to talk about Brexit because it's business as usual for them, the racism that that projected.**

MD Yeah I think there's something, from reading Chantelle's work there's a lot of similarities along different lines but similar type of, some similar things going on to people I spoke to, and I have strong feelings about Brexit but didn't feel strongly affected by Brexit and they often related their disappointment or their anger in relation to other people and Europeans coming to Britain for example, and particularly stories about how they felt about Brexit were very often connected quickly to European friends or family members, quite a few, quite a few stories came up about younger family members who had parents from Britain and a country in the EU or countries completely outside of the European Union but the effect on children that it had that really affect them and they were worried that they were going to have to leave the country or they weren't sure about what this meant for their identity whether they could still be English or British, so there was a strong connection with, a worry for other people first and foremost. In terms of their own, how they felt affected personally there was often a sense of well we're not exactly going to get kicked out of Spain or anything any time soon so that wasn't really a concern. I think that specifically links to the type of life stage that they're at for a lot of these people, but given they're in their first year, they haven't completely firm, they don't have firm roots here and the type of labour market they're working in is temporary, there was not talk of for example buying properties, setting up businesses, that type of thing.

**MB So not necessarily their life stage but their stage in their migration journey so they were recent newcomers to Spain for the most part, you did have some people who were there for a lot longer, so they were still finding their way and kind of trying it out.**

MD Yeah. Even the people that had tended to be there for example for like four or five years, there was often, there was often the idea that they might be moving somewhere else, whether it was somewhere within Spain or Britain or perhaps another country. They didn't have this fixed roots as a lot of the people that I think you've been speaking to for example.

**MB I think that's quite significant because if they're not a settled, settled population which is I think the assumption, the assumptions that underpin a lot of the discussions around citizens' rights in respect of Brexit, a lot of the kind of concern are necessarily because of the way that freedom of movement regulations work, freedom of movement directives work, they are necessarily about settled populations, they're not necessarily about populations who haven't yet decided where they want to settle or indeed are not planning on being settled in any one particular place, and I think that's quite, it's quite specific to particularly that group of young people that you**

**spoke to, in a way that points out what the challenges are for Brexit in terms of thinking about these more mobile, more flexible young populations.**

MD Yeah definitely, there were quite a few real strong examples of that, of people who didn't want to identify with even being UK citizen for example, which is another story, but really really strongly associated with the idea of being like a traveller and people talked about kind of old nomadic cultures and stuff like that but there was a strong element of not being rooted to specific locations.

**MB But did they not think that Brexit might challenge that a little because that's a kind of a discourse about freedom, aside from anything else. You know, one of the things that you said was that they, they didn't really contemplate the impact of Brexit on their lives.**

MD Yeah I guess to be clear about how people felt about Brexit, if disappointment was one of the key things that people felt, uncertainty was the other, people responded often to that, the question of how they felt affected by Brexit or with the notion that no-one really knows what's going on with Brexit so it's, it was described and I think it's a good metaphor for the overwhelming feeling of what people felt as a cloud on the horizon which no-one really knows what's going to happen, so there's a sense of you can't really prepare for something that you don't understand yet, but people were taking steps to make sure, to try and make sure they're OK so applying, there's lots of people applying for passports via Irish or French grandparents for example, people were making sure that they were registered locally which they might not have before because it's quite easy to live and work in Spain without doing that, things like that. What I kind of think about it is that this sense of, which Karen's work has written about, this sense of not wanting their lives to be structured, this kind of looming cloud in the distance, is a potential threat to that but people aren't really sure and one thing that's, I've thought about recently is that an unintended consequence of the potential threat from Brexit might well be that people decide OK I am going to put my roots down a little bit here whereas they might not have wanted to do that before, the fact that there's a potential threat to that, I think people for example one person I spoke to, Andrew, he lives in Seville with his girlfriend, he describes himself as really taking it as it comes each year and not making too many plans but he's 100% I might stay in Spain all of my life and raise a family here, but equally he might well go back to Britain, he describes that he definitely wouldn't be going back to Britain any time soon because it might make it more difficult for him to come back so Brexit's also having that type of effect.

**MB Yes. So staying put for now. Staying in Spain for now until, well just in case that rug's taken out from underneath his feet. So what you've kind of talked about is how Brexit as a context might change some actions and some Brexiters, but I'm quite interested in**

**exploring with you this sense in which how they understand Brexit is located within the context of their lives and the context of their relationships with the labour market, which it seems to me are in many cases, I mean you've got people who've travelled all over Europe and, in that sample as well, they're not just people who've just left the UK and gone to Spain, but also people who seem to be quite adaptable and quite flexible because those are the expectations of the current labour market. Do you think that's a fair, well very brief summary really but d'you think that that ...**

MD Yeah definitely. I think, it's a generation for which change happens so quickly that the idea of some really fixed notion of a plan just wasn't present in any, hardly any of the interviews really. Many people spoke about making plans as kind of this thing that they desperately try to avoid because it often, things change outside of your circumstances so Frank for example, I think he answered it with well any time I've made a plan it changes anyway so I don't try to do that too much, people talked about maybe having dreams or aspirations of directions to move in but not making too fixed plans because things change. And I think in terms of the labour market I think there's a real sense of, given the relative ease that people have enjoyed with the European Union it's something that people have often thought about, for example what to do after uni, well you could go and work here, it's just something that's become quite normal, especially for younger generations it's a symptom of globalisation, so it will be strange to see how that changes and how, as though if those potentials of working there got shut down will be increasingly looking within, within Britain itself rather than outside I guess.

**MB Yes I think it's, I mean my, I think that you're right in some ways that, I wouldn't necessarily say it was a symptom of globalisation but it might be that that's a stage of European integration that we've reached which, you know European integration was, you know largely about integration of the labour market and free movement of goods, services, capital and people and for labour purposes, and so they might be equivalent to what Adrian Favell whose book Eurostars and Eurocities referred to as Eurostars, these people who were coming over to London for example or Amsterdam and working in like a coffee shop for a little while, while they looked for other jobs in those places which might mean that they became much more settled in time but that was like their, their foot in the door, their starting point to first of all get to London so that they could look for work in London, and I wonder if there's something a little bit similar going on there which is actually a symptom of an integrated European labour market that allows people to move in order to seek work, which you know you could, what on one level you could interpret them as doing that, the people that you've spoken to, but it might also speak to a changing labour market where increasingly people are required to be quite flexible and are required to move around a lot, I think that the English language teaching labour**

**market across Europe is one of those industries that does rely on people who are quite transient or there for a particular period of time, and I might be reproducing a load of stereotypes here so if I am just rein me in like but people who want to go and live somewhere for a particular period of time and want to, and have those language skills that they can share, you know could go and do that so a little bit I suppose like an equivalent might be au pairs, you know those types of jobs that we, that were always perhaps temporary short-term fixed-term projects that allowed people to try that out.**

MD Yeah definitely. Obviously you get, you get everything because people move for whom it becomes more of a career so I know people who've been working as English teachers for going on decades now of course but definitely there's an element that's quite similar to some other sort of summer seasonal jobs, that type of thing, sure a lot of people. One interesting example of people's capacity to accept change and uncertainty, one of the participants that I spoke to who felt most strongly, perhaps the most strongly about Brexit was John, who's married to a Puerto Rican and for them it was a massive thing because depending on what happens with the freedom of movement because of Brexit they might not be able to stay in Spain anymore, his wife might not be able to stay in Spain anymore so they're trying to work out options and it's going to be a massive ...

**MB And she wouldn't necessarily be able to accompany him to the UK either right?**

MD Yes, so they can't, yes so she isn't, or it would be very expensive and they'd have to have a lot of money to be able to do that etc. So he wasn't sure what was going to happen and he had his contract which ended in January but he seemed quite calm at the prospect of that he wasn't necessarily going to be staying in Granada and now he's living in Barcelona working in a different job for example, so there was quite a sort of sense of normality about the potential changes and kind of I felt there was a strong feeling of Brexit taking, sitting alongside lots of other potential things that may change that would drive people to live in different countries or move around, that people in their choice to have moved to Spain seem to kind of have already accepted that for many reasons they might not be staying in Spain forever, or they might be moving to a different place, so there was that type of thing of Brexit was one among many things that might mean that they weren't going to stay where they were.

**MB I think that's a really important point and I also think that that sense of normality, we might want to think about it as well in terms of what the stakes might be, and the thing that I think's quite interesting about speaking to young people, I've spoken to young people as well in France, not as many as you have but I've spoken to quite a number of people in their 20s and 30s, is to do with how actually, you know they have to get on with their lives as well and as**

**you say that idea, I like that idea of Brexit happening alongside all of other things, all sorts of other things that are happening in people's lives, it's important to remember that we don't just fixate on Brexit as a singular issue that's influencing what happens with people's futures and what happens with their, you know, how well they've planned in some ways so I think that's a really really good way of characterising it. I think that that's been a pretty comprehensive introduction to the study so thank you very much Mike.**

MD Thank you.

**MB Thank you for listening to the Brexit Brits Abroad podcast, hosted by Dr Michaela Benson and produced by Emma Houlton at art of podcast. The series is part of a UK in a Changing Europe funded research project, Brexit Brits Abroad, that's all about what Brexit means for UK citizens living in the EU 27. We're really keen to hear from you about the issues and concerns we address in the programme, so please do get in touch with any thoughts, queries and questions. You can find out contact details on our web page [brexitbritsabroad](http://brexitbritsabroad.com), or get in touch via social media, we're on Twitter @brexpatseu and we have a Facebook page Brexitbritsabroad. Finally, in case you're not already subscribed to the podcast, you can do so on both iTunes and Google podcasts. Thank you for listening, and I'll be back in a couple of weeks with the next episode.**