

Living the dream in rural France: Why do people choose to migrate?

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(Phys.org)—A University of York researcher claims the idea of 'the rural idyll' is far too simplistic an explanation for why British people choose to migrate to rural France.

Drawing on the [migration](#) stories of British residents in the Lot, South West France, Dr Michaela Benson, from York's Department of Sociology, argues the reasons behind the move abroad are far more complex.

Recent studies of migration have tended to dwell on the pull of the rural dream or on [economic factors](#); the fact that people have the money to turn their dreams into reality. However, Dr Benson argues the reasons behind people's decision to migrate involve a huge number of variables which need to converge to turn 'imaginings' into concrete action.

Based on her research, she presents a theoretical model for understanding lifestyle migration, arguing that migration can only be understood by thoroughly examining structural reasons – factors such as economic and political changes and a person's class - in conjunction with agency, the power of an individual to do what they want.

Dr Benson's findings are published in the December issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

She said: "If you ask people why they have moved to France they will often point around them and say it's because it is so beautiful or because

it is like Britain used to be in the past – safer, friendlier and so on.

"However, these responses hide very personalised biographies and a much more complex set of variables. People's decisions are often based on previous travel or holiday experiences, while factors such as globalisation, economic and political changes and people's class also play an important role.

"A large portion of the British population share the idea of a rural idyll and could afford to make it a reality, but only a small percentage of people actually act on their dream and move to France."

Dr Benson conducted 12 months of ethnographic [fieldwork](#) with British residents in the Lot to gain detailed insights into the migration decision and post-migration lives of the generally affluent British migrants.

With many of those interviewed, she found there was a watershed moment at the core of the migration; redundancy, retirement and children leaving home were all presented as factors explaining the timing of migration.

However, it also became clear that for all the migrants, lives led before such watershed moments were building up to that point. For many migrants, the knowledge and skills of how to live abroad had been gained through other overseas experiences – working abroad, as part of the military or through tourism.

More information: The article "How Culturally Significant Imaginings are Translated into Lifestyle Migration" is published in the December issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

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Provided by University of York

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