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# Freedom seekers in **PARADISE**

*Investigating the relationship between Swedish remote workers in  
Lisbon and the local population*



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## **Abstract**

In this research study, which has focused on Swedish lifestyle migrants in Lisbon (Portugal), the attitude towards the phenomenon of lifestyle migration has been investigated more deeply. Lifestyle migration is an academic concept that describes the people who are relatively privileged and who move to a cheaper country to improve their quality of life. The phenomenon has grown significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Pull factors are often warm weather, getting more for the money, fun activities, and meeting like-minded people. From the interviews conducted with Portuguese residents in Lisbon, with lifestyle migrants from Sweden, as well as through web surveys with international lifestyle migrants, five recurring themes were particularly mentioned: In what ways lifestyle migration (1) improved the quality of life. How it possibly contributed to (2) gentrification. The sometimes lack of integration that created (3) social imbalance with the local population. How lifestyle migration can create (4) local development. But also, how it can create a sense of (5) social and economic injustice.

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## Table of contents

<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 AIM OF STUDY .....	5
1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	5
1.3 ABOUT THE RESEARCH .....	6
<b>2. METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: PHENOMENOLOGY.....	7
2.2 SAMPLING STRATEGY: CONVENIENCE SAMPLING.....	7
2.3 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS .....	8
2.4 DATA ANALYSIS .....	9
2.5 ETHICS AND LIMITATIONS.....	10
<b>3. BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>12</b>
3.1 A BACKGROUND IN THREE SECTIONS.....	12
3.2 THE DEVELOPMENT AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT LIFESTYLE MIGRATION .....	12
3.3 REASONS BEHIND LIFESTYLE MIGRATION .....	14
3.4 APPLYING LIFESTYLE MIGRATION: SOCIAL COHESION .....	15
<b>4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>16</b>
4.1 THE IDEA OF A BETTER LIFE – COMPARING SWEDISH LIVING STANDARDS TO PORTUGUESE LIVING STANDARDS.....	16
4.2 REGULATIONS ON LIFESTYLE MIGRATION IN PORTUGAL .....	16
4.3 GENTRIFICATION .....	18
<b>5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>20</b>
5.1 IMPROVED QUALITY OF LIFE .....	20
5.2 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT .....	21
5.3 SOCIAL IMBALANCES.....	21
5.4 GENTRIFICATION .....	22
5.5 INJUSTICE.....	23
<b>6. DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>26</b>
6.1 HOW DO LIFESTYLE MIGRANTS COEXIST WITH THE LOCAL POPULATION IN LISBON?.....	26
6.2 CONCLUSION .....	27
6.3 OWN CONTRIBUTION & FUTURE RESEARCH.....	28
<b>7. REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>8. APPENDIX 1 (INTERVIEW GUIDE).....</b>	<b>32</b>

# 1. Introduction

Humans are masters at adapting to a changing environment. Ever since industrialization, the western human lifestyle has changed radically - in several rounds. For example, the world is currently seriously affected by Russia's war in Ukraine, but also by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has eventually changed the lifestyles of many Europeans. While the COVID-19 pandemic has led to limited possibilities to travel, remote work has become popular, and the interest for freelance work has been sprawling, even when it comes to doing it abroad (Hermann & Paris, 2020).

The process has developed quickly. Initially it was a small group of millennials enjoying their freedom and influencer lifestyle, often calling themselves digital nomad pioneers. Now it has become a discussion of “overnomadism” in post-COVID epochs (Cook, 2020). In search of a lifestyle with more self-determination and cheaper surroundings, remote working abroad has been the answer for many, especially in warm countries among north European remote workers. The number of expressions for this group of people are many, including expatriates, digital nomads, and neo-nomads (Hannonen, 2020). Most commonly, they are from wealthy countries and move to a country where they can get more value with their income (McGarrigle, 2021; Benson & O'Reilly, 2019). A digital nomad is a person who is a mobile professional, whilst an expat has moved abroad for a longer time (Hannonen, 2020). An umbrella term for people who are relatively affluent or from wealthy countries, and who move partly or full-time, to places that offer a higher standard of living, is *lifestyle migration* (Hermann & Paris, 2020).

Research has long shown that behavioral patterns among wealthy people, moving abroad, often follow certain tracks. Several of these suggest that lifestyle migrants often cluster in the same areas and like to establish an entrepreneurial international environment around them (Cook, 2002). But at the same time, research has shown that lifestyle migrants contribute to gentrification to a great extent (Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2021). Currently, several initiatives are being taken to attract lifestyle migrants, such as visa-free stays, destination promotions, digital nomad visas, e-residency, and cheap taxation (Parreño-Castellano, et al. 2022). The most attractive areas are the ones that often are deliberately shaped to become entrepreneurial hubs for a new urban tourism, which have become a major attraction for lifestyle migrations, preferably in combination with the area having a high authentic and cosmopolitan vibe (McGarrigle, 2021). In Lisbon, it has led to serious consequences, not least when housing prices

increased at an extreme speed (Antunes & Seixas, 2020). The question is then who will be the winners and losers in this campaign?

Existing scholars have mainly focused on the careers of lifestyle migrants, the opinions about the destinations, advantages of being or becoming a lifestyle migrant, and the social interaction between lifestyle migrants (Zhang & Su, 2020). Due to a research gap on how lifestyle migrants affect the local environment, which for example Hannonen (2020) suggests should be further investigated, this research will contribute with a critical angle in this area. Thus, by exploring the relationship between the local population and lifestyle migrants, this study can reduce the existing research loopholes in the area. However, due to limited data collection, it will provide a small scale understanding of the attitudes, and how local people and lifestyle migrants coexist. In other words, the study says a lot about a small, small piece in a big puzzle.

## 1.1 Aim of study

The aim of the study is to understand and compare the attitudes on lifestyle migration in Lisbon between local inhabitants and Swedish lifestyle migrants. Accordingly, this may be of importance for the shaping of future cities, workspaces and communities. But possibly also to create environments, policies, and projects that enable both local inhabitants and international remote workers to co-live sustainably. The study may also contribute with an understanding of how to avoid possible emerging problems with lifestyle migration, such as gentrification or cultural clashes, in order to create sustainable strategies for global migration in the future.

## 1.2 Research questions

Consequently, this study will attempt to answer the following research question (RQ):

***RQ: How do lifestyle migrants coexist with the local population in Lisbon in terms of cultural, social, and economic values?***

In addition, the study has two supporting questions:

RQ 2: What are the lived experiences about lifestyle migration from the local population?

RQ 3: What are the lived experiences about lifestyle migration among lifestyle migrants?

### 1.3 About the research

This research has investigated the phenomenon of lifestyle migration by analyzing lifestyle migrants and local inhabitants' opinions about, and experiences of the phenomenon. To best fit the study's research approach, an inductive research method was chosen with abductive elements. The research was conducted partly through traveling in Lisbon, where my local interviewees were found. But foremost by interviewing the participants over the phone as well as familiarizing with previous research on the subject.

By obtaining experiences and beliefs, this research has created an understanding of subjective perceptions on how lifestyle migration and the local population coexist. Further, a qualitative research design can gain in-depth knowledge in a research field that is yet unknown. By doing this, this study can build a piece of the puzzle of what the relationship between lifestyle migrants and the local population looks like, in this worldwide growing phenomenon. However, the nature of this study is phenomenological and strives not to present any deep analysis of concepts emerging, such as gentrification or lifestyle migration in general. Rather, the focus is on the lived experiences of the participants. Hence, it will not give an overarching description, but rather a particular insight into a broader field of research that has received growing attention in recent years.

The largest limitation of this study is the scarce data, and the study should therefore not be seen as a fully representative picture of how lifestyle migrants and locals in Lisbon interact and have opinions about each other. Rather, it serves as a complement to similar studies in the field. The limited collection of data has been appropriated with the knowledge of a relatively short time span to conduct the study. In total, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted, four with Swedish lifestyle migrants and three with local key informants from Lisbon. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data was analysed using qualitative content analysis (QCA).

The next chapter will offer a methodological framework, in which the study's approach is further explained. After that, a background explaining how lifestyle migration has developed and looks like today is presented. Then a conceptual framework that describes what influences the decision to become a lifestyle migrant, as well as how it can affect the local environment. The results of the study will then be presented, based on the interviews carried out with the local population in Lisbon, and with lifestyle migrants from Sweden. These results are presented based on themes that emerged during the QCA. In the following discussion, the meaning of the phenomenon from both participant groups are compared and discussed.

## 2. Methodology

In this section, the methodology is presented, including a presentation of why this study is important for the general knowledge, but also in what way it is justified, relevant, ethical, and will reflect the world out there.

### 2.1 Methodological approach: Phenomenology

Phenomenology is an approach commonly used to describe the meaning of a lived experience, focusing on humans' perception of "being in the world". The approach hence strives to gain knowledge about the lived experience of "being-in-the-world" (Bryman, 2011).

By using a phenomenological approach, this study serves to emphasize the importance of not only inward emotional change, but outward experiences affecting people's relationship to each other and the phenomenon in question. It is focusing on the conscious experiences of people and tries to unpack the underlying structures that make up the world. Crossley (2001) believes that lived experiences are rooted in habitual agency, which is shared by constructivist key assumptions of the creation of knowledge and reality. It is a way for the qualitative researcher to shorten the distance between him/herself and those who are researched (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology has its origins from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, coined by the mathematician Edmund Husserl, and is today a popular method to gain knowledge about "what" people experience, and "how" they experienced it (ibid). This type of analysis often involves in-depth interviews with certain themes, which was also the case for this research. Phenomenology suits this study as the concept of Lifestyle Migration is best understood through the people living in it. However, a major challenge is any upcoming bias connected to the role of the researcher that could possibly follow. A description of my research role, as well as methods to avoid biased results, will therefore be presented later on in this chapter, in accordance with the phenomenological idea of "bracketing" (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### 2.2 Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling

To collect interviewees, convenience sampling was used. I found the lifestyle migrants through three different Facebook groups: "Lisbon Nomads", "Lisbon Nomads | Lisbomads" and "Lisbon Digital Nomads & Expats". A text, informing about the research, was first published, that called for interviewees, which resulted in four lifestyle migrants' respondents. Inclusion criteria for the lifestyle migrant respondents were self-identification as a lifestyle migrant or digital nomad, born in Sweden, Swedish speaker, all ages, all genders, currently living in

Lisbon. Three of the lifestyle migrants were men, one of them was a woman. They were all working remotely with digital communication or constructing websites.

The local participants from Lisbon, three in total, were recruited during the month of March 2022, in Lisbon. They were working in different tourist guiding firms in Lisbon and were asked verbally at their workplace if they wanted to participate in the study, which was to later be carried out over the phone. Interviewing tourist guides was a conscious choice, as they are considered key informants within the subject and can provide more in-depth knowledge about the current situation affected by the phenomenon. The inclusion criteria were English speakers that had been living in Lisbon for at least three years, tourist guides, all ages, all genders. The participants received written information about the study, and the interviews were conducted over the phone or through digital video conferencing. None of the respondents had any relationship to each other. Therefore, this study is circulating on a convenient sampling method, in which certain people have been targeted, in order to easier reach those who are familiar with the phenomenon.

For this study, which wants to get a smaller insight into what the opinions between lifestyle migrants and local population-lifestyle migrants look like, the total number of seven respondents are sufficient (four lifestyle migrants and three Portuguese inhabitants living in Lisbon). All four lifestyle migrants were Swedish citizens, but currently living in Lisbon where they worked remotely. This research, with a limited amount of data, will hence represent a small picture of the specific context, and not provide a general explanation. This type of sampling strategy was advantageous as the study asked for a particular research group: lifestyle migrants who live in Lisbon. After verbal consent on participating, the interviews were conducted in Swedish with the lifestyle migrants and in English with the Portuguese respondents. All interviews were made over the phone or through digital video conferencing. All interviews were recorded.

It should also be added that the study tried to reach lifestyle migrants who would fill out a form online - without further success. The four responses that were collected did, however, correlate with the semi-structured interviews and will be shortly presented.

## 2.3 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interviews were planned after suggestions by Alan Bryman (2006) on how to do semi-structured interviews properly and ethically correct. In doing so, all interviews were conducted using an interview guide (see Appendix 1) with a semi-structured approach. Thus,



as an interviewer, it enables follow-up questions, even if the actual basic questions in the interview revolve around the interview guide. The advantages of using semi-structured, individual interviews are that it allows for in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon. The semi-structure lets the participant speak freely about the matters, guided by the interviewer if necessary. In that way, themes can emerge freely, limiting the researcher's potential interference with the data. The interviews were conducted in both Swedish and English according to preferences from the participants. The same interview guide was used for both groups, enabling proper comparison. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using QCA, as shown below. All the interviews with Swedish lifestyle migrants, which were conducted in Swedish, were transcribed and translated into English prior to data analysis.

## 2.4 Data analysis

When analysing data, several methods of analysis are possible. In this case, where data is presumed not to be entirely rich but limited by quite few interviews, qualitative content analysis is indeed suitable. Analysis is conducted according to the process described by Graneheim & Lundman (2004). Through the analysis, data is condensed, coded and clustered into emerging themes. It is a suitable tool to analyze whole interviews, but also to produce trustworthiness in the way the researcher highlights assumptions (Ibid). The results will be presented on a manifest level, making the informants comments remain unchanged, only categorized, which is in line with phenomenological analysis methods, where the role of the researcher is bracketed to minimize risk of interpretation when creating the manifest level themes (Creswell & Path, 2018). Hence, this research has let the answers speak, and not the researchers' strategic connections that can fit the desired result. In the discussion, however, latent levelled themes will arise as a result of the researcher's own interpretation of the differences of the experienced meaning between both groups. Qualitative content analysis hence offers the possibility of both manifest and latent emerging themes but requires no further interpretation of the data as is the case with, for example, grounded theory (Bryman, 2006).

In the example (see figure below), answers that touched on topics have been linked to certain themes. One of these themes was *gentrification*.

Meaning unit	Condensed Meaning Unit	Code	Theme
<p><b>“Our minimum wages here are 720 euros per month, that is not much, in fact, it is a very low wage. Today, you need at least 400 000 euros to get an apartment here. These are prices you can compare with Berlin, but the problem is that our wages are four times less.”</b></p>	<p><b>The prices on houses have rocketed in Lisbon. But it can't compete with LM.</b></p>	<p><b>Makes the houses too expensive</b></p>	<p><b>G e n t r i f i c a t i o n</b></p>
<p><b>“But on the other hand, more people were forced to leave the city. It is now difficult to find Portuguese people in the city center, even more difficult to hear the Portuguese language, anywhere in the city. Cities are becoming. They are becoming like this concept of “air-cities”, which means they look the same. In terms of businesses, shops, coffee shops, the city is losing its true values. It is a reflection of something that never really existed. It is a sad recreation of a town.”</b></p>	<p><b>It forces Portuguese people away. You don't even hear our language. It is sad.</b></p>	<p><b>The Portuguese people are forced away</b></p>	

Figure - Example of the QCA process, where meaning units are developed to condensed meaning units, coded, and categorized. LM = Lifestyle Migrant

## 2.5 Ethics and limitations

As always, the choice of methods has ethical issues to take into consideration. The ethical considerations will be presented in two sections: one concerning the collection, handling and storage of the data, and one concerning the issues arising through social interaction, the role of the researcher and the interviews.

### 2.5.1 Ethical considerations and limitations: The data

Data collection took place through interviews using either phone or online video calls. Prior to the recording, participants were informed about the aim of the research, their rights to withdraw from the study at any time and recall any information, as well as the fact that the data will be presented anonymously, at categorical levels only. They were asked to provide a verbal consent after the initiation of recording. Hence, non-maleficence and autonomy was secured for the participants. The nature of the interview is merely practical and descriptive, not asking for any private details or other ethically questionable information and is hence not considered to cause any harm for the participants. However, the participants were informed that if any un-

comfortabilities would arise during the interview, they have the right to avoid answering the question. Hopefully, the participants can benefit from participating as they are provided a chance to express their own ideas and experiences, and in the long term, might partake in a more sustainable relationship within the phenomenon under study. The participants were also informed about the password-protected storage and handling of the data, which guarantees that only me as researcher have access to it. A verbal consent could be problematic, since the recording needs to be initiated before the participants consent to being recorded. However, through thorough information prior to recording, it was ensured that the information was fully understood, and any questions were answered to clarify the situation.

### 2.5.2 Ethical considerations and limitations: The social aspect

Since this research is about complex social relationships, it can create a sensitive relationship between the two research groups: local population in Lisbon and lifestyle migrants in Lisbon. With great respect for this, the ethical considerations surrounding this study are highly important, and certain choices have been taken not to cause problems. Among other things, by allowing interviewees to remain anonymous, not to describe individuals in detail, or to weigh someone's opinion higher than anyone else's. In the end, this study is about having perspectives weighed together and compared on a categorical level. Another relevant aspect to consider in any qualitative research studies is the role of the researcher. In line with the phenomenological approach, bracketing has been used to limit any possible interferences from me as researcher when creating, as well as conducting, the interviews. In the data analysis, results are mainly presented on the manifest level, to ensure legitimacy of the results. However, transparency is an important factor, of which my own background needs an explanation:

I am a white, 28-year-old man born and raised in Sweden. I recently conducted a study about social supermarkets in Sweden, criticizing the commercial food systems as well as the concept of charity supermarkets and how the system affects people from different economic classes. I am interested in societal issues, sustainability, and of course cultural geography in general. During my travels in Spain and Portugal in the spring of 2022, my perception of lifestyle migration grew as I got to see both positive and negative aspects of the phenomenon. After studying the current literature about lifestyle migration, I figured that an in-depth analysis in Lisbon would contribute with contextual knowledge concerning this relevant phenomenon.

## 3. BACKGROUND

### 3.1 A background in three sections

This section aims to describe the background of the phenomenon of Lifestyle Migration in three sections, beginning with the development of the concept, followed by the presumed reasons for people to engage in Lifestyle Migration, and how the branches of the phenomenon arising when it gets intertwined into already existing cultures.

### 3.2 The development and knowledge about Lifestyle Migration

Youth nomadism is a label that has been more and more evident in the past decades, especially since the 1960s, when the aviation industry surged, living standards improved, and social structures were loosened. Young people started to travel in new ways, leading also to a significant increase in new accommodation types, such as hostels (Bozzi, 2020). It completely changed the tourist landscape in a global perspective, and even restaurants, bars, transports, and guest houses were refashioned to favor this group (Ibid). Since the 1980s, international traveling to achieve “self-fulfillment” has been a global trend and has ever since increased, often including many different scientific labels, such as neo-nomadism, flashpacking, bohemian lifestyle migration, digital nomadism, and lifestyle migration (Hannonen, 2020).

Working with a laptop one day, exploring exotic foreign places the next day, has become the desired normal for many. The pandemic caused the phenomenon to grow in importance. The label “digital nomad” became especially popular. Between 2019-2020, the google searches on “digital nomad” increased by more than four times (Hermann & Paris, 2020). Institutions for co-working have been established, and specific neighborhoods in scores of cities around the world have come to be adapted for international remote workers. Inevitably, the discussion easily ends up with the question: What is migration and what is transnationalism? Well, these concepts can easily be intertwined. This is also the case of the concepts of “expat”, “digital nomad”, or “lifestyle migrant”, and the more negative reputation of the word “immigrant”. They all are somehow synonyms, as they refer to people who have moved to another country. However, they are distinguished by status. For example, migrant workers occupied as pickers and truck drivers are considered migrants, the richer counterpart, who are entrepreneurial digital workers, are seen with a more positive touch and are often called “expats” or “digital nomads”, in what academic researchers describe as “lifestyle migrants” (Schlagwein, 2018). In an The Guardian article, Koutonin (2015) raised this issue, which

received wide media coverage, with the title “Why are white people expats when the rest of us are immigrants?”. Without doubt, the subject can be a sensitive issue to touch upon, as it stirs up many emotions. Another example is the researcher Erin McElroy (2020) who suggests that those who call themselves digital nomads, with their privileged backgrounds, create a racist approach just by calling oneself nomad, as some, such as the Roma population, are forced to be nomads involuntarily, while some privileged people push nomadism as “freedom pleasure”. In other words, there are both privileged migrants, and undesired migrants.

With this said, the need to examine the process with a postcolonial lens is relevant, if not necessary. The research on postcolonial dimensions within privileged migration has been increasingly investigated, for example in Benson & Osbaldistons (2014) “Understanding lifestyle migration”, which is a major contribution in the field of lifestyle migration research. In such a discussion, we can, for example, ask questions about who has access where and how/if the rich immigration today differs from that which existed in the colonial past. More and more research indicate that north to south lifestyle migration increasingly occurs due to declining pensions and a less attractive welfare in the home country (McGarrigle, 2022). In the book "Pension-planet", Gavanas (2016) describes how Swedish pensioners often hierarchically categorize themselves among each other, where those who live all year round have the highest status, followed by those who only live in Spain in the winter, and finally the ordinary tourists. One explanation for this, according to the pensioners, is that those who live there for a long time can be considered more integrated (even if they do not know Spanish or hang out with Spaniards).

Immigrants are often expected to adapt to the majority society that surrounds them, but does that really apply to lifestyle-seeking immigrants from richer countries? If so, what would the expectations be to that type of integration? What does one's integration mean? The most common answer to that is that integration is strongly linked to the amount of "participation" (Beckman, 2011). But it is still unclear within both the EU and Sweden what participation in the country means. Is it that residents should be equally involved in activities? That the inhabitants should be equal? Treated equally? Or live well together? Expectations are often different between immigrants, and perhaps the regulations are already diluted. To avoid limitations in the theoretical analysis of the data, the umbrella term lifestyle migrants, under which digital nomads are included, is suited to use.

### 3.3 Reasons behind Lifestyle Migration

From the place-dependent format of industrialization, where workers were a cog in a gigantic production chain, the success of digitization has enabled a freer lifestyle where some individuals can choose to establish a home office anywhere in the world, making it an enormously flexible work structure. Being tied to a place is therefore no longer needed, and a search for a place that offers a higher quality of life then becomes the answer, for some. Benson and O'Reilly (2009) suggest that, as already have been mentioned, that lifestyle migrants are persons who are relatively affluent and are searching for a higher quality of life. Most of the existing research assent that lifestyle migrants are often from an affluent background, well-educated, and in an age around the 30s, with a career-driven mindset (Chevtavaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021). However, from the very limited research of Swedish lifestyle migrants who move to Portugal, some research suggests a different picture. Daniel Rauhuts (2021) results have shown that the lifestyle migrants moving from Sweden to Portugal, rather than emerging from the middle class, often come from the lower, or higher social hierarchy and move away because of the degraded welfare-, the political correctness-, and an increased general disappointment of Sweden. It may then be that Sweden has a different pattern of who becomes a lifestyle migrant, since the general research shows another picture (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). It is common, however, for lifestyle migrants to be considered rich by the local population, as they come from a richer country, and thus are often entwined with the local upper class (Hayes, 2021). As a consequence, many lifestyle migrants feel that they need to "give back" to their local environment due to the material inequality, sometimes by paying overprices and sometimes by volunteering, as a moral support (Ibid).

Lifestyle migration had a rapid increase during the pandemic. Hermann & Paris (2020) suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increased interest in being independent and having more personal freedom in post-COVID times, which resulted in a massive increase of remote working. When the worker no longer had to go to the work office, and the meetings were moved online, the need of being situated in a geographic location was suddenly questioned. As a result, many countries have strategically tried to attract people who can work remotely, to cities with newly constructed facilities of public office space and co-op areas, combined with a tropical climate and cheaper products (Caminero & McGarrigle, 2022).

The growing group of lifestyle migrants, which is characterized by a high entrepreneurial spirit, has increasingly intertwined a relaxing journey with work by being adventurous like the backpackers, searching for the pursuit of authenticity like the tourists, and

pushing it into the technological advancement of the 21st century (Bozzi, 2020). The idea of freedom, and living a free life, attracts many people. Freelance jobs have emerged as especially frequent among lifestyle migrants, enabling employment flexibility, which often is a recurrent narrative: leaving a corporate job to gain “digital freedom” (Thompson, 2019). Further, lifestyle migration is equally connected to identity-making journeys and projects, often driven by consumption, that in the long run can improve the person’s social hierarchy (McGarrigle, 2021). But the hunt for freedom and self-realisation for one person might inflict the opposite for another.

### 3.4 Applying Lifestyle Migration: Social Cohesion

Within the phenomenological field of migration studies, the theory of social cohesion is often mentioned. Within social cohesion, some key values are recurrent: participation, trust, equity, and respect - that together can form harmonious activities in the local environment (Jenson, 2010). Social cohesion behavioural patterns might be easier understood in a setting where the migrants have less social protection or financial support. Research on lifestyle migration has shown that social cohesion is a key aspect during the application of the phenomenon; It can be tricky to know the regulations of healthcare, insurance, taxes, and immigration in every country. As a result, the co-op between lifestyle migrants is often strong, and they often share spaces and settle down close to each other, instead of live-in proximity with the locals from the host country (Cocola-Gant & Lopez-Gay, 2020).

Residents’ attitudes to tourists are usually foremost positive, as it often leads to preservation of old buildings, increased cultural identity, cultural exchange, and sometimes a stronger social cohesion where the local community can foster stronger participation and sharing of ideas (Costa, et al. 2020). On the other hand, residents also describe negative aspects of tourism, such as traffic congestion, vandalism and drug or alcohol use, and breakdown of cultural codes of behaviour (Ibid). However, the “desired migrants” are often from richer countries, since they are seen as individuals who can promote the area and who have high social capital (O’Reilly, 2019).

## 4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is an illustration of the variables that are expected to affect the lived experiences of the phenomenon, and further the comparison between the two groups. This framework is based on three conceptual assumptions often associated with this type of phenomenological interaction: (a) The idea of a better life, (b) Host nation's regulations on lifestyle migration, and, (c) The patterns of gentrification.

### 4.1 The idea of a better life – comparing Swedish living standards to Portuguese living standards

The fact that Portugal wants to attract lifestyle migrants has an important underlying reason: affluent people are attractive for the country. In Portugal, the average salary is 29000 US dollars per year, compared to 48000 in Sweden (OECD, 2021). Moving from a rich country to a poorer one is becoming more and more common, and a polarizing effect of this has been that other people, who come from rich countries, have criticized those who chose to move to a cheaper country - often with accusations of selfishness (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014). However, in the last 20 years, the huge increase of people who make the decision to become a lifestyle-related permanent tourist, or a tourist for a long time, has a core reason: to get a better quality of life (Rauhut, 2021). The two most common countries for Swedish lifestyle migrants to move to are Spain and Malta, but the de-bordering of Europe has made more and more people move to Portugal, and the number of permanent Swedes in Portugal increased from 1620 in 2006 to 4900 in 2019 (Ibid). In Rauhuts research on Swedish lifestyle migrants moving to Portugal, the most common pull-factors to move to Portugal were the low taxes, to escape unemployment, due to sickness which is mitigated by warm climate, to reach a stronger social network, or to leave Sweden since it was considered slowly turning into something bad (Ibid).

### 4.2 Regulations on lifestyle migration in Portugal

Catrin Lundström (2019), who has done extensive research on retired Swedish expats living in Spain, concluded that moving abroad, if you are born in a rich country, has been a successful way to pick the raisins from two countries, meanwhile not benefitting either of the countries. Dauvergne (2009) suggests it is the people who are privileged who take advantage of this, while poorer people, from poorer countries, might be even more excluded by globalization and technological development (2009). In fact, in some areas, paradises for lifestyle migrants and tourists are emerging, where remote workers can meet professionals from all corners of the



world. McGarrigle (2021) research showed that Lisbon is regarded as an important hub for new urban tourism, in which the city's authenticity, charm and cosmopolitanism are highly valued, making it a perfect place that mixes networking, the good climate, and an old town with genuine atmosphere. The Swede can then first work remotely, and then sunbathe, swim and surf after work - all year round.



Figure 1 - Example of a national campaign to attract lifestyle migrants to move to Portugal. Source: Visit Portugal, (2020).

Many factors can influence the choice of location to work remotely, such as good welfare in the host country. But the legal process, to be able to stay in the country for a long time or for good, is also of enormous importance, such as free movement within the EU. At a furious speed, more and more countries are now offering “digital nomad visas” to attract international remote workers. In Portugal, this strategy became prominent already after the economic crisis in 2008, which was followed by generous regulations to attract rich migrants, in what was called the “Golden Visa Programme” and “Non-Habitual residents’ fiscal regime” (McGarrigle, 2021). The regulations have remained in place, and show a neoliberal agenda from Portugal, where rich people could gain a Portuguese “Golden Visa” if they either transfer capital of one million euros or more, if they create 10 jobs or more, or if real estate is purchased in Portugal with an amount of at least 500 000 euros (Gaspar & de Haro, 2020). A minimum

requirement was to visit the property for at least two weeks a year. Another strategy was the “new urban rental regime” from 2012, which resulted in major residential displacements all over Lisbon, and was later described as a failure (Madeira et al. 2021; Antunes et al. 2020; Caminero et al. 2022), among other things since it greatly liberalized the housing market. Rental contracts became more flexible and long-term tenants became easy to evict, often in advantage for the fast-growing numbers of tourists and lifestyle migrants. From then on, Lisbon was focusing on short-term rentals (STR), including companies such as Airbnb, which established a hyper-flexible rental market for short term rent, which resulted in a major transition of the city (Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2021). Plenty of STR-platforms emerged during the pandemic, to easier rent out apartments for international customers as remote working abroad has been a rapidly growing market (Dagkouli-Kyriakoglou et al. 2022). However, this short-term apartment model highly rests upon the neoliberal strategy of a perfect flexible market, which has not been shown to correspond with reality. The president of the Rental Association in Lisbon, Antonio Machado, had a critical point of view (Mancini, et al., 2017):

*“We have seen a transformation of housing from residences for families to short-term rentals...private houses rented out for tourism that, in some areas, caused rent price to rise by 30-40 % over the last few years, which is practically unbearable for local Portuguese people”*

### 4.3 Gentrification

Lifestyle migrants are often creative, which is a strong driving force of city planning, although it often pushes the poor people away in a process known as gentrification (Dominguez-Mujica, et al. 2021). When a residential area changes housing users to a richer class, gentrification is produced (Hammel, 2009). It is a social, cultural, and economic process. Research has shown that high skilled migrants have a connection with gentrification (Lopez-Gay, et al. 2020). When prices are pushed up by wealthier people, the poorer people can't stay. This can happen in different ways, but it usually happens when the place becomes popular, of which people who are richer than the current residents buy the homes and in the long run the prices go up so that only the rich can live in the area. However, ever since Ruth Glass used the term in 1964, the explanation and meaning of gentrification has changed and is ever changing but is foremost used to describe luxury renovations in deteriorated urban areas, raised property values, or activities and products that are aiming to attract a rich crowd (Hammel, 2019).

The process of gentrification can be witnessed all over the world and is a major challenge to avoid (Ibid). However, it is usually described in a context where people from the

same nationality compete to exclude each other from residential areas. When remote work now causes people to move abroad, to exotic and economically advantageous areas, gentrification moves to a more complex global level. If we look at Lisbon, the intensive growth has led to a massive spread of expensive short-term rentals, increased social injustice, and a strong gentrification (Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2021). The investments in tourist accommodation and high-end properties have led to a situation where the Portuguese lower- and middle class, as well as the young people, can't afford housing in Lisbon and in similar cities in Portugal (Marquez, et al. 2022). Only in the years between 2013-2018, there was a double number of evictions in Lisbon (Mendes, 2020). Buyers of apartments in Lisbon 2021, paying tax in another country, paid an average of 4,283€ per square meter, while locals paid 1,858€ per square meter, indicating that the local population are buying properties further out from the city centre (Lorga, et al. 2022). The median price per square meter in Lisbon in 2021 is 3296€, after having doubled in five years (Ibid), and is for example higher than in Malmö, Sweden (Mäklarstatistik, 2022).

Tulumello & Cocola-Gant (2022) – both researchers at Universidade de Lisboa – suggest that state incentives and new policies needs to be implemented to create a sustainable housing market, rather than to maintain the brutal urban capitalism in Lisbon, where the state has rather helped the gentrification process by making the positions of apartment rentals more fragile, meanwhile more prospering for investors. Ever since the economic crisis in Portugal back in 2008, the emergence of STR:s have dominated the housing situation in parallel with state de-regulations. On top of this, Portugal has marketed itself as a paradise for tourism and for remote work on a permanent basis. Inevitably, the market of lifestyle migrants exploded, but gentrification became part of the result. Nicola Bozzi (2020) describes the growing trend of remote work in a poorer country as a neoliberal hyper-capitalistic version of Silicon-Valleys entrepreneurial culture, driven by the individualistic and career-driven era we live in. But it probably doesn't develop without reason. Hannonen (2020) suggests lifestyle migrations are developing naturally, in parallel with the rest of society's development, characterized by rapid technological development, increased individualization, globalization, mobility, and increased digitization of currencies and real estate.

Then, how will this process continue? Bozzi (2020) suggests that what we now see is techno-imperialism, which will dominate many areas, where lifestyle migrants are the pioneers, and now have the power to change the places they move to, to their advantage. Perhaps there is something vital in the statement - because quite obviously the areas that attract lifestyle migrants can change radically.

## 5. Results and analysis

In the following chapter, the results will be presented. The main theme and answers from the conducted interviews are clustered into six emerging categories, according to the emerged themes from both groups in the interviews: *gentrification, injustice, improved quality of life, social imbalances, and local development*. All potential diversities between both groups are further discussed in the discussion section. In line with phenomenological approaches, it is suitable to use only manifest content analysis in this section. Lifestyle migrants are abbreviated with LM, local population with LP.

### 5.1 Improved quality of life

Why become a lifestyle migrant in the first place? The two most frequent answer to that was: it brings freedom, and it improves the quality of life. The fact that it was Lisbon, and not another place in the world the interviewed lifestyle migrants went to, had several different reasons. The reasons were, among other things, that Stockholm was too expensive, not least housing, and that the job market was tough in Sweden. But getting more for the money was the most recurring reason in the interviews - that it is cheaper in Portugal than in Sweden. The climate was another important reason, to get warm weather all year round. But also, the amount of easiness. A recurrent answer was that it is easy to move to Portugal and get around. Another reason was the fun activities offered around Lisbon, including surfing, museums, exploring beautiful nature, and climbing:

LM: *“Well, in my travels I experienced that many digital Nomads go to Bali and Lisbon. These places have in common that, if you get a salary from US, Sweden or Germany, you will have a luxurious lifestyle over there. You can go for dinner every night, and do fun excursions, but still live way cheaper than in your home country.”*

Interestingly, it was also brought up that a reason for the move was the broad existing culture of international remote working in Lisbon, which is welcoming international entrepreneurs and tech-workers, making it a hub for professionals. In this way, Lisbon can be attractive to lifestyle migrants because it has a professional aura, which is not just about partying and bathing, but also about a career-driven mindset that pushes their skills further.

## 5.2 Local development

The impacts of tourism and lifestyle migration were both emphasized and criticized by the local population. Some comments mentioned that the skills of lifestyle migrants, who often have high education and/or entrepreneurial qualities, may rub off on the local population. But also, that it creates more jobs, which can be valuable for the economy:

*LP: "I hate to say it, but it is good for Portugal. I mean, what else do we get other than tourism? We have olive oil, wine, some textiles, and football players. Our main product is the sun, without it, Portugal would be screwed".*

In this quote, it becomes clear that there is a hesitant attitude. That although tourism is problematic in its ways, it is invaluable for Portugal's economy, making it a contradiction. Even lifestyle migrants spoke of this - that the tourism helps the country in the long run, which they also felt the locals thought:

*LM: "Here in Portugal, they seem to think that we are developing the economy in a good way, which is kind of interesting, they think in macro factors, that it helps the country as a whole."*

When the policies around lifestyle migrants were mentioned in the interviews, many different threads were brought up. One common theme was housing regulations, which, according to local respondents, often are made in favor of short-term rental companies such as Airbnb, to facilitate accommodation for lifestyle migrants, which makes prices higher, and often degrades the city's quality. This was also discussed by the local respondents. However, tax regulations were the most dominant theme. From the local's point of view, the rules are too much in favor of lifestyle migrants, and should to a larger extent be redesigned to improve the Portuguese welfare and the salaries of the Portuguese people:

*LP: "Probably, we need policies that capture more tax revenues from digital nomads, because despite them just passing by a few months or more, they are entitled to the same public infrastructure that we are paying for through our taxes. If a digital nomad is injured from an accident they will use our health care, it is us who pay for it."*

## 5.3 Social Imbalances

It has already been clear that Lisbon is a core city for lifestyle migration. But how do lifestyle migrants view their relationship with locals? The answers were split. The same amount of

positive and negative/skeptical answers were provided. Many of them identified reasons for the local population to be both negative and positive regarding lifestyle migrants:

*LM: "The locals are critical. Not explicitly, but you notice it. They see us as rich Westerners who can do whatever we want in Lisbon, there is not much concern on our part about the increased prices, but for the local population it will of course be tough. But at the same time, I can't feel that we digital nomads are destroying, because I think, as I said, that there are also many advantages we bring to Portugal."*

When it comes to existing regulations, seven responses pointed out that current tax rules for lifestyle migrants are unclear/poor, even when it comes to the information about getting a visa. However, the promotion of the local population's wages and residential areas were also raised as an important measure by all respondents but one. However, three of the four lifestyle migrants meanwhile wished for more favorable regulations to lifestyle migrants:

*LM: "The system could be changed a bit, perhaps that the tax we digital nomads pay is increased and then used to raise the average salary for Portuguese people. Or maybe that we help the local people in the places where we live, in my case in Lisbon. One could therefore find ways to get us to leave behind money that adds to the area we live in. But this is easier said than done, and perhaps the charm of being able to settle abroad is that it is cheap."*

## 5.4 Gentrification

When the respondents, four lifestyle migrants and three local persons, were asked about how they think Lisbon is affected by international remote workers, a majority described it as causing prices to rise, the Portuguese people to move away from the inner city, and an exclusionary reshaping of Lisbon. This was considered by several respondents to be the troublesome side when many lifestyle migrants moving there, even by some lifestyle migrants:

*LM: "I read somewhere that digital nomads come to Lisbon to die, it's a last stop, because the place is so good. But there are tricky sides to this too, e.g., house prices that have skyrocketed in Lisbon. In Portugal it is generally cheap, but not in Lisbon, and when it comes to housing prices, it can be compared to Gothenburg or Malmö. Imagine a Portuguese person, who maybe earns 600 euros a month. It will of course be impossible to buy a home in Lisbon. This causes many Portuguese to move further and further out of the city, but also away from the city to other areas of Portugal. That is tragic."*

A lost sense of place was another issue, described by the local population. This, they believed, arose by the combination of too much tourism and when tourists don't adapt to Portuguese culture and customs. As a result, the needs of tourists, does transform Lisbon into a boring city without its original characteristics, according to the local guides:

*LP: "It is now difficult to find Portuguese people in the city center, even more difficult to hear the Portuguese language, anywhere in the city. Cities are becoming. They are becoming like this concept of "air-cities", which means they look the same. In terms of businesses, shops, coffee shops, the city is losing its true values. It is a reflection of something that never really existed. It is a sad recreation of a town."*

Also, the respondents who responded in the online survey (four in number) had opinions on how lifestyle migrants avoid the local customs, and suggested that there should be a requirement to be integrated to a certain degree. However, one respondent felt that it would not address the major problem with wealthy tourists in Lisbon:

*LM: "(They) drive up rental prices for people with local wages!"*

Change in cities due to large-scale influx of tourists was considered to pose problems among both lifestyle migrants (applied to both interviewees and from surveys) and local residents. But respondents on both sides mentioned that the countryside can be a savior in such an equation, and become a strategic action for Portugal:

*LM: For Portugal's part, which has long attracted diligent international entrepreneurs and tech workers, it is beginning to realize problems that many are drawn to the same places.*

*Now they are trying to attract people further inland instead, where it is more sparsely populated, which I think is positive. If they are to invest in digital nomads, it should not be in big cities but in the countryside."*

## 5.5 Injustice

When lifestyle migrants answered what their relation is towards other lifestyle migrants, several different aspects emerged. Some recurrent answers were that they mostly hung out with other lifestyle migrants, that they co-worked together, or that they went to certain meetings/courses intended for lifestyle migrants. In other words, positive experiences. But when their attitude to other lifestyle migrants were asked about, some negative/skeptical

answers aroused such as: (1) LM doesn't adapt to the surroundings, (2) that LM often cluster together with other LM, (3) but also that LM doesn't contribute to the local environment:

*LM: "So, my co-working colleague and I have talked about this quite a bit. We are sick and tired of digital nomads. My colleague says he tries to create Communities that really drive the area. But the digital nomads just tear in, get served, but contribute nothing. They are somehow not aware that you also need to invest your own time and love in the place for it to function in the future"*

When the local residents were asked about their attitude to lifestyle migrants, they also described that the adaptations were often low among the lifestyle migrants. However, the local residents believed that they might contribute more than short-time tourists, since they stay longer in Portugal, and therefore can be trusted and respected in another way than usual tourists. On the other hand, the local residents believed that lifestyle migrants also have a negative effect on social coherence, produce gentrification, and make the local area feel injustice. One respondent mentioned that immigrants from poor countries versus immigrants from rich countries achieve different amount of respect, which create a sense of injustice:

*LP: "The existing regulation isn't built for this kind of professionals, the EU hasn't adapted the rules. It is different rules for Brazil, Poland, and Morocco, who immigrate to Portugal and find a job. Maybe they find a work on a restaurant or work as a cleaner. But the digital nomads, often from north west Europe and America come here with their own job, but earn multiple more than us."*

All respondents, both lifestyle migrants and Portuguese, predicted that lifestyle migration will continue to grow and become increasingly common, or even a norm, in Portugal and the rest of the world. In other words, that lifestyle migration will be more and more frequent. Parallel to this process, the regulations around national borders might disappear, believed several lifestyle migrants. A local respondent had a prophecy that the economic inequalities might escalate and make the social classes become more divided: that the lifestyle migrants aren't really contributing with spill-over effects, and rather makes the situation worse:

*LP: "The transport, the services, the people – it is changing so fast right now. Within five years it can be totally different from now, maybe Lisbon becomes a rich town and us Portuguese people can get included in the digital nomad high-tech industry making our*



*economy grow fast. But I am a bit afraid that it won't spill over on our population. That it rather creates a luxury city center in Lisbon, similar to San Francisco, where it will be impossible to live in the city and where homeless people are popping up everywhere. We are not there yet, but homelessness is growing, although we are more of a social welfare state to help these people unlike the US. But I am concerned that the social classes will be way more apparent than they are at the moment. We might get cities with extremely rich and extremely poor, just like in Brazil."*

Other respondents also believed, as mentioned, that the phenomenon of international remote work will increase. But this end quote, which shows a hope on a possible good future for Lisbon, but rather believes in a dark picture of how the city can develop into a totally gentrified inner city, shows the brooding attitude towards the phenomenon.

## 6. Discussion

In this chapter, linkages between the research question, the theoretical framework, and the results will be drawn into an empirical analysis and end up with a few summarized sentences.

### 6.1 How do lifestyle migrants coexist with the local population in Lisbon?

While remote work has become a norm, the possibilities in such a way of working have also widened the horizons. Moving abroad, to a cheaper country with a warm climate, has become an increasingly common trend (Hannonen, 2020). The choice to move abroad and work remotely is influenced by many different factors: what the regulations look like, how easy it is to get housing, the climate, and how much you get for your money (McGarrigle, 2021). Those who move abroad to gain a higher standard of living, for a short time or for good, are called lifestyle migrants (Hermann & Paris, 2020). In this research, lifestyle migrants who moved to Lisbon were interviewed about their attitude to the local population and other lifestyle migrants, as well as how they think it affects Lisbon. The same questions were then asked to three Portuguese key informants working as tourist guides in Lisbon.

The answers show a cautiously optimistic attitude on the phenomenon from lifestyle migrants, but where the issues of gentrification and poor adaptation were raised as potential issues. As previously mentioned, lifestyle migration does have a negative effect on housing, as it often tends to lead to gentrification processes (Cocola-Gant & Gago 2021). In Lisbon, rental contracts have been more flexible, less affluent and easier to evict, and the number of international investors skyrocketed, leading to expensive housing for the local population (McGarrigle, 2021). On the other hand, lifestyle migration is warmly welcomed by Portugal, since the country facilitates kind regulations and widely advertises itself to attract wealthy tourists to stay in the country for a long time (Parreño-Castellano, et al. 2022). Interestingly, the majority of lifestyle migrants who participated in this research, thought that the regulations, such as taxes, were generous to them, and should be appropriated to the local population to a greater degree.

The local respondents mentioned that lifestyle migrants spend a lot of money in Lisbon, create jobs, and contribute with their skills. But in total, the local population had a negative opinion of lifestyle migration in Lisbon, and a common opinion was that it is transforming the city into something expensive and unrecognizable. However, a potential solution to this could, according to some answers from both sides, that the Portuguese countryside should be the

future of lifestyle migrants in order to really make it positive for the country. A contrast to that opinion is that the lifestyle migrants considered proximity to other lifestyle migrants to be an important reason for the move. Lisbon is serving as a career-driven hub for international remote workers. Both local population and lifestyle migrants (from both interviews and web surveys) believed that this created poor integration in Lisbon in which a division was created between local population and lifestyle migrants, as well as the avoidance of cultural norms and customs. Previous research has, however, shown that migrants often stick out with other migrants in a foreign country, in order to gain social cohesion (Cocola-Gant & Lopez-Gay, 2020), which shows that the phenomenon is hardly unique to Lisbon (Cook, 2002). It should nevertheless be repeated that the study was carried out only a few months after the strict rules surrounding COVID-19 disappeared, which may affect the results.

Overall, there was an understanding from both sides: the locals could see why lifestyle migrants choose to move to Portugal, and the lifestyle migrants could see that locals think it's unfair that they can live a more luxurious life. Power imbalance was never mentioned, but was often said between the words, and perhaps that is where the discussion should end up in this research study. The regulations are created more and more favorably for high-income remote workers, the marketing to attract them is also more and more common. There is no clear right and wrong in doing or by being a lifestyle migrant in Lisbon, no respondent thinks so. But there are different possibilities for different individuals, depending on where they are born. This may be the reason for the comments of requests for improved conditions for the local population in Lisbon, who suffer from the rising housing prices (Antunes & Seixas, 2020).

All respondents predict that the phenomenon of lifestyle migration will continue to increase. Hence, it can become extra important to ensure that the local population feels that lifestyle migration helps to shape a future that also benefits them.

## 6.2 Conclusion

From the conducted interviews in this research, lifestyle migration was described as an important source of income for Lisbon, although it brought several issues. One of those issues was how the city is rapidly gentrifying. Both Swedish lifestyle migrants who settled in Lisbon, and Portuguese people who work as guides in Lisbon, believed that the local population should benefit from the growing tourism to a greater extent, for example by increasing taxes on lifestyle migrants that can accrue to local wages.

Lifestyle Migrants chose Lisbon because it increases the quality of their lives, but at the same time they felt that it created social imbalances. This was confirmed by the locals. A two-way dilemma developed - a sense of freedom and opportunity among lifestyle migrants, but also a sense of injustice at the expense of the local population. For the local population, the experience was that lifestyle migration developed the local community in several ways, but at the same time contributed to gentrification and worsened the situation for many individuals and destroyed the feeling of an authentic, Portuguese Lisbon.

### 6.3 Own contribution & future research

This study has contributed a small part to the growing understanding of lifestyle migration. Going forward, it would be interesting to know in more detail how local areas are affected by too much tourism and lifestyle migration, or what the correlation between increased tourism and displacement looks like. Additionally, the perception on tourism among the local population and visitors, can be further explored.

If today's lifestyle migrants often have a quite homogeneous lifestyle and background, the situation might change in the coming years. The possibilities of a border-free world of post-work, beyond the one that exists within the EU, might involve all kinds of people from different socio-economic status and backgrounds, creating a radical global shift.

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## 8. Appendix 1 (interview guide)

1. Do you know about lifestyle migration? How would you explain a lifestyle migrant?
2. What is your attitude to lifestyle migrants (expats & digital nomads)?
3. What are the positive things with lifestyle migration?
4. What are the bad things with lifestyle migration?
  
5. What areas are the best areas/nations to go to as a lifestyle migrant?
6. Why do you think some places are more popular than others for lifestyle migrants?
7. How do you think the way lifestyle migrants live affect the local environment?
8. In what way has it affected your neighborhood in Portugal?
9. In what way may it affect the Portuguese people? (Positive? Negative?)
  
10. Is lifestyle migration something that should be encouraged or not? Why?
11. What do you think about the existing policies regarding lifestyle migrants?
12. How do you think the local policies should look like?
13. How do you see your future as a lifestyle migrant?
14. How do you think the future of lifestyle migration will look like in general? In Lisbon?