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Retirees from Europe migrating to Thailand: A study of two co-occurring occupational transitions

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ABSTRACT

Background

Retirement migration has increased in Global North societies. However, little is known about how migration affects individuals' transition into retirement and their occupational engagement. This study explored the experience of co-occurring occupational transitions of retirement and migration.

Methods

A constructivist grounded theory approach was used. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 21 retiree migrants from Europe living in Thailand.

Results

The co-occurring transitions of retirement and migration are a dynamic process where retirees go back and forth between both transitions. The process is described in four periods: (i) beach period, (ii) real-life period, (iii) becoming established and connected, and (iv) thoughts on health and future. In the early part of the process, the migration transition is more dominant. Once it plateaus, the retirement transition is more dominant. After this period, retirees have thoughts of possible migration back to their country of origin in the future.

Conclusion

When migration and retirement transitions co-occur, they intertwine in a process where each alternately takes prominence until both achieve a stable phase of establishment over time. This study shows how retirement and migration influence each other, shaping retirees' occupations, identity, and well-being, and provides insights into how people adapt to major life changes.

RÉSUMÉ

Contexte

le phénomène migratoire chez les personnes retraitées est en croissance dans les sociétés du Nord global. Cependant, on sait peu de choses sur la manière dont ce phénomène migratoire affecte la transition des individus vers la retraite et leur engagement occupationnel. Cette étude a exploré l'expérience des transitions occupationnelles cooccurrentes, soit celles de la retraite et de la migration.

Méthodes

Une approche de théorisation ancrée a été utilisée. Les données ont été recueillies par le biais d'entretiens approfondis avec 21 personnes migrantes et retraitées, originaires d'Europe et vivant en Thaïlande.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Ciencia ocupacional; jubilación; migración; transición ocupacional; adultos mayores; teoría fundamentada

关键词

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Résultats

Les transitions cooccurentes de la retraite et de la migration constituent un processus dynamique dans lequel les personnes retraitées font des allers-retours entre les deux transitions. Le processus est décrit en quatre périodes : (i) période de plage, (ii) période de vie réelle, (iii) s'établir et se connecter, et (iv) réflexions sur la santé et l'avenir. Au début du processus, la transition migratoire est plus dominante. Une fois qu'elle a atteint un plateau, c'est la transition de la retraite qui domine. Après cette période, les personnes retraitées ont des réflexions quant à un éventuel retour dans leur pays d'origine.

Conclusion

Lorsque les transitions de migration et de retraite sont cooccurentes, elles s'entrecroisent dans un processus où chacune prend alternativement le dessus sur l'autre jusqu'à ce qu'elles atteignent toutes deux une phase de stabilisation et de consolidation. Cette étude montre comment la retraite et la migration s'influencent mutuellement, façonnant les occupations, l'identité et le bien-être des personnes retraitées, et donne un aperçu de la manière dont les gens s'adaptent aux changements majeurs de la vie.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**Hintergrund**

Migration im Ruhestand hat in den Gesellschaften des Globalen Nordens zugenommen. Es ist jedoch wenig darüber bekannt, wie Migration den Übergang von Individuen in den Ruhestand und deren Eingebundensein in Betätigung beeinflusst. Diese Studie untersuchte, wie die gleichzeitig stattfindenden Betätigungsübergänge von Ruhestand und Migration erfahren werden.

Methodik

Es wurde ein Ansatz der konstruktivistischen Grounded Theory verwendet. Die Daten wurden durch Tiefeninterviews mit 21 europäischen Rentner*innen erhoben, die im Ruhestand nach Thailand emigriert sind.

Ergebnisse

Die gleichzeitig stattfindenden Übergänge von Ruhestand und Migration sind ein dynamischer Prozess, bei dem Rentner zwischen beiden Übergängen hin und her wechseln. Der Prozess wird in vier Phasen beschrieben: (i) Strandphase, (ii) Realitätsphase, (iii) Sich etablieren und vernetzen, und (iv) Gedanken zu Gesundheit und Zukunft. Im frühen Teil des Prozesses ist der Migrationsübergang dominanter. Sobald dieser Übergang ein Plateau erreicht, überwiegt der Ruhestandsübergang. Nach dieser Phase denken Rentner über eine mögliche Rückkehrmigration in ihr Herkunftsland in der Zukunft nach.

Zusammenfassung

Wenn Migrations- und Ruhestandsübergänge gleichzeitig auftreten, verflechten sie sich in einem Prozess, bei dem abwechselnd jeweils einer in den Vordergrund tritt, bis beide über die Zeit schließlich eine stabile Etablierungsphase erreichen. Diese Studie zeigt, wie Ruhestand und Migration sich wechselseitig beeinflussen und dabei die Betätigungen, Identität und das Wohlbefinden von Rentnern prägen. Sie liefert Erkenntnisse darüber, wie Menschen sich an bedeutende Lebensveränderungen anpassen.

RESUMEN**Antecedentes**

La migración de jubilados ha aumentado en las sociedades del Norte Global. Sin embargo, se sabe poco sobre cómo la migración afecta la transición de los individuos a la jubilación y a su participación en ocupaciones. Este estudio explora la experiencia de las transiciones ocupacionales concurrentes de jubilación y migración.

Métodos

Se utilizó un enfoque constructivista de teoría fundamentada. Los datos fueron recopilados mediante entrevistas a profundidad a 21 migrantes jubilados procedentes de Europa que vivían en Tailandia.

Resultados

Las transiciones concurrentes de jubilación y migración son un proceso dinámico en el que los jubilados van y vienen entre ambas transiciones. El proceso se describe en cuatro periodos: (i) periodo de playa, (ii) periodo de vida real, (iii) establecerse y hacer conexiones, y (iv) ideas sobre la salud y el futuro. Al principio del proceso, predomina la transición migratoria. Una vez que se estabiliza, la transición a la jubilación es más dominante. Después de este periodo, los jubilados piensan en la posibilidad de volver a su país de origen en el futuro.

Conclusiones

Cuando las transiciones de migración y jubilación coinciden, se entrelazan en un proceso en el que cada una toma protagonismo de manera eventual hasta que ambas alcanzan una fase estable de consolidación a lo largo del tiempo. Este estudio muestra cómo la jubilación y la migración se influyen mutuamente, configurando las ocupaciones, la identidad y el bienestar de los jubilados, y proporciona información sobre cómo se adaptan las personas a grandes cambios en la vida.

摘要

背景: 在全球北方社会中, 退休迁徙现象日益增加。然而, 目前对于迁徙如何影响个体进入退休阶段的过渡过程及其职能参与了解甚少。本研究旨在探讨退休与迁徙两种职能过渡同时发生时的体验。 **方法:** 本研究采用建构主义扎根理论方法, 透过对21位居住于泰国的欧洲退休移民进行深度访谈收集资料。

结果: 退休与迁徙的共同过渡构成了一个动态过程, 个体在两个过渡状态之间不断往返。该过程可分为四个阶段: (一) 海滩期; (二) 现实生活期; (三) 建立联系与融入期; (四) 关于健康与未来的思考期。在初期阶段, 迁徙过渡更为显著; 当迁徙趋于稳定后, 退休过渡成为主导。在此之后, 部分退休者开始思考未来是否回到原居国生活的可能性。

结论: 当迁徙与退休过渡同时发生时, 两者会交织进行, 在不同阶段各自占据主导, 最终趋于稳定, 达成一种职能建立的平衡状态。本研究揭示了退休与迁徙如何彼此影响、共同塑造退休者的职能表现、身份认同与整体福祉, 并为人们如何适应重大人生变迁提供了重要见解。

Retirement is seen as a significant occupational transition from paid work to free time, providing retirees with opportunities to increase engagement in desired occupations (Eagers et al., 2019; Jonsson et al., 2000), potentially improving perceived health and well-being (Pet-tican & Prior, 2011). Nonetheless, occupational transitions can be unpredictable and complex, involving changes to roles and the familiar structure of daily life (Jonsson, 2011; Morley, 2006). While many retirees transition into a satisfying retirement pattern, others find it an ongoing process of frustration and dissatisfaction (Jonsson et al., 2001), with adjustments in identity, time use, and social roles deeply influencing their sense of purpose and well-

being (Jonsson et al., 2001). Consideration of diverse experiences of transitioning into retirement is important because, worldwide, the number of people aged 60 years and older is increasing from 1 billion in 2019 to an expected 2.1 billion in 2050 (World Health Organization, 2021). One in four people in Europe and Northern America, where retiring from work is the norm, is expected to be 65 or over by 2050.

Migration involves transitioning from a familiar to an unfamiliar environment, with consequent disruption of social networks, demand for cultural adaptation, and decline in overall well-being (Bennett et al., 2012). Migrating can also profoundly alter daily life and occupational engagement (Gupta, 2013; Gupta & Hocking,

2018), thus affecting migrants' occupational identity (Hart, 2022; Huot & Rudman, 2010). Moving abroad during retirement offers many opportunities for social engagement, including undertaking new social activities and making friends (Thomas, 2016).

Moving from a high- to a middle- or low-income country has become a practical preference for retirees from the Global North, who temporarily or permanently relocate to achieve an improved quality of life (Özyurt, 2023; Repetti & Lawrence, 2021), commonly for economic reasons (Croucher, 2012). Sources differ, however, regarding their health and financial resources. Some hold that they often have more financial resources, enabling them to afford a higher standard of living in sunny climates, enhancing their overall happiness (Bell, 2017). Walters' (2000) analysis, however, revealed retirees with low incomes, severe disabilities, and/or absence of a spouse.

The socioeconomic status of retirees migrating internationally impacts integration and access to resources in the new country (Savaş et al., 2023). The concept of 'lifestyle migration' underscores how being privileged enables choice of retirement destination based on desirable lifestyles rather than necessity, a luxury that is not available to all (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). Social class and privilege often determine access to resources, opportunities, and networks, which influence the types of occupations individuals can engage in and the ease with which they navigate transitions (Gustafson & Cardozo, 2017). Those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds usually have better access to support systems and more financial security (Hayes, 2021). This difference is seen in the experiences of Scandinavian retirees in Spain, where wealthier migrants can afford to reside in enclaves with fellow retiree migrants and access services in their native languages, thereby minimizing the need for cultural and linguistic integration (Gustafson & Cardozo, 2017).

Thailand has become a popular retirement migration destination due to its pleasant climate, diverse culture, unique cuisine, convenient and affordable living facilities, and hospitable environment, which aligns with the preferences and financial considerations

of many retirees seeking a quality life abroad (Ashton, 2019). Retirees from the Global North in Thailand have been found to mediate the adverse effects of aging and enhance their well-being through migration (Botterill, 2017). However, cultural differences, lack of skills, language barriers, and multiple simultaneous transitions can complicate the process (Haas, 2013; Hamilton & Jonge, 2010; Toal-Sullivan, 2006). A survey among 152 retiree migrants in Thailand reported that retirees considered themselves to have a limited understanding of the culture and languages (Howard, 2008).

In summary, retirement and migration have been studied separately as occupational transitions. However, to our knowledge, no study has studied them as co-occurring transitions. This study aims to explore the experience of the co-occurring occupational transitions of retirement and migration among retirees from Europe living in Thailand.

Author Positionality

The first author shares a similar cultural background (Caucasian European) with the study participants and experienced migrating to Thailand transition during the interviews, which heightened his sensitivity to the nuances of such experiences. However, there were key differences such as age, career stage, and migration purpose that may have influenced how the data were interpreted. The second author has over 30 years of experience researching retirement and now contributes insights from personal experience as a retiree. The third author has experience in qualitative research and personal experience in migration.

Material and Methods

Design

A qualitative explorative design was applied, using in-depth interviews for data collection and a grounded theory approach for data analysis. Recruitment, data collection, and analysis were conducted in Thailand between January and August 2021. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the National

Table 1: Characteristics of participants in the study ($n = 21$).

Characteristics	N
Gender	
Female	5
Male	16
Living with a partner	9
Working status	
Full-time retired	19
Part-time working	2
Age (years)	
Mean	68
Range (min-max)	65-82
Years living in Thailand	
Mean	7
Range (min-max)	1-10
Country of origin	
Belgium	2
Netherlands	17
Sweden	2

Research Council in Thailand (Project No. 0401/2258).

Participants

The inclusion criteria for the study were (i) being a retired European migrant, (ii) living permanently in Thailand for 1 to 10 years, and (iii) aged at least 65 years. People who worked part-time (less than 1-day a week) were also eligible. Jonsson (2011) emphasized that retirement is characterized by a move from structured, work-related tasks to a more self-directed way of life, requiring retirees to discover new sources of meaning and purpose. Therefore, the focus in this study extended beyond the immediate cessation of work to include the broader, ongoing process of adapting to a new stage of life which might involve re-engaging in work, volunteering, or other meaningful occupations. A recruitment flyer was posted on a popular website among Dutch people interested in living in Thailand, which has 275,000 monthly visits from 85,000 individual visitors. Additionally, the flyer was sent to retirement groups living in Thailand. Of the 47 individuals who responded, 21 fulfilled the inclusion criteria and consented to participate. The sample size was carefully considered to ensure it remained manageable for in-depth analysis. Participant characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Data collection

The first author developed an interview guide to cover a wide range of participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2006) of the co-occurring transitions. Examples of interview questions are: Can you tell me about how you came to move to Thailand for your retirement?, How has moving to Thailand changed your daily routines compared to living in your country of origin?, Can you share what contributed to a positive or negative experience of retirement?, and What challenges have you had being retired?

Participants had their questions related to the research consent answered and provided written or verbal consent based on the approved format (Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 2018). In-depth interviews, lasting 90-120 minutes, were conducted from January to July 2021. Sixteen were in person and five were by video call due to COVID-19 restrictions during the interview process. The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed confidentially. Participants were given pseudonyms during data processing.

Data analysis

The constructivist grounded theory approach employed to analyze the data involved an iterative process of coding and refining categories to develop a theoretical understanding (Charmaz, 2006). The process began with initial line-by-line coding of the transcripts to identify and develop preliminary categories. As analysis progressed, these initial categories were refined and adjusted through focused coding to better capture the emerging themes and relationships within the data. This iterative process allowed for modifying and enhancing categories based on new insights and data patterns, ensuring a more accurate representation of the participants' experiences. The first author continuously compared data across different sources, revisiting and revising categories as needed, and consistently cross-checked the emerging analysis with the original transcripts during the data analysis to ensure the participants' experiences were accurately captured. He also wrote process memos to

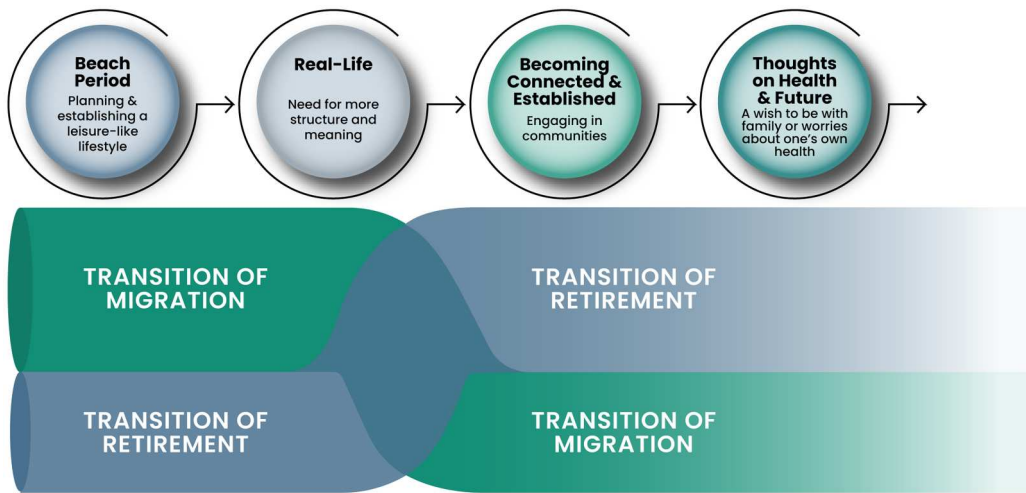


Figure 1. The process of co-occurring occupational transitions of retirement and migration over time.

aid the analytical process. Collaborative discussions with co-authors enriched understanding of participants' perspectives.

Because most interviews were conducted in Dutch, the quotes used to illustrate the findings were translated to English by the first author. This translation was recommended to minimize loss or change of meaning (van Nes et al., 2010). The analysis itself was conducted in English, and no formal back translation process was undertaken. However, translations were carefully reviewed to ensure consistency in interpretation.

Findings

Four categories were identified from the analysis: (i) beach period; (ii) real-life period; (iii) becoming connected & established; and (iv) thoughts on health and future (see Figure 1). The migration transition is dominant in the first two categories, whereas the retirement transition is dominant in the last two categories. The 'beach period' encompasses the entire journey from envisioning a relaxed, beach-centered lifestyle to fully realizing and living it. This phase begins with imagining oneself at the beach, followed by the planning, preparation, and adjustments needed to establish a leisure-like lifestyle in a tropical setting. Initially, this lifestyle fulfilled participants' desires for rest and relaxation. However, as time passed and the novelty wore off, many craved additional structure and

meaning. This shift marked a progression toward what they often referred to as 'real life', where they sought a deeper sense of purpose beyond leisure. From experiencing 'real life', participants started to engage more in their communities and proceeded to a period that was characterized as 'becoming connected and established'. The last category, 'thoughts on health and future', was characterized by participants' plans for the future (e.g., a wish to spend time with family or worrying about one's health). Retirees would revisit parts of their transition of migration as their needs in the transition of retirement changed.

Beach period

Participants described different decision-making moments where they gave themselves permission to pursue a healthy and happy life, of which moving to Thailand was a contributory factor. They envisioned themselves enjoying life in a tropical climate, visiting the beach all year round, traveling and exploring, often imagining it as a well-deserved reward after years of hard work. This period was characterized by decision-making, realizing dreams, gaining new experiences, and retirement expectations. *"Ik dacht bij mijzelf, ik heb altijd hard gewerkt, ik denk dat andere dat nu mogen doen, nu kan ik genieten van mijn gouden jaren nu dat ik nog mijn gezondheid heb. [I thought by myself,*

I always worked very hard, so now others can go and do it, work, and I can enjoy my golden years while I am still in good health]" (Maurice, male, 68 years).

Participants often started planning their retirement during the last years of their working life. Searching for possibilities abroad aligned with their lives as they typically lived or travelled abroad in their childhood and adulthood or worked abroad for periods in their careers. Gerda reflected, for example, on becoming skilful in adapting to new environments as a child: *"Ik denk dat wat heeft bijgedragen is dat toen ik jong was mijn ouders bijna jaarlijks verhuisde van mijn vijfde tot mijn elfde. [I think what has contributed to being able to migrate is that when I was young, my parents moved almost every year since I was 5-years-old until I was 11-years-old]"* (Gerda, female, 71 years).

Participants who never lived abroad planned their retirement in Thailand by making multiple short visits to the country, engaging in daily occupations to get an honest perspective on how daily life would be different from the typical holiday visit. For example, participants consciously engaged in occupations such as shopping for groceries, communicating with neighbours, and regularly cleaning their temporary apartment. Another important consideration was not causing distress or sorrow among loved ones by migrating.

After migrating to Thailand, participants engaged in occupations considered helpful in settling in a new environment. Usually, they felt confident and described how pre-existing skills and experiences assisted them during the initial period, helping them adjust and adapt to new environments, and keeping them occupied, able to manage projects, be organized, make social contacts, live abroad, and be independent. One participant shared how managing a project in his garden together with community members helped him to adapt to his new environment.

I have tried to work with nature, not against it like most people. Most people do agriculture, yeah, and so I had the happiest times in my life the first few months that we worked in here, and it was really

hard physically. A lot of digging and walking in the heat. (Olaf, male, 73 years)

A former manager from a large company reflected on how he viewed migrating and retirement as projects and how his experience managing projects helped him: *"In mijn leven heb ik situaties behandeld als projecten, emmigrenen naar Thailand zag ik als een soort van mijn laatste grote project. [I, in my life, have handled situations as projects, so moving to Thailand was sort of my last big project]"* (Peter, male, 82 years).

Initially, participants found participating in occupations in new communities, usually made up of foreigners temporarily or permanently living in Thailand, to be essential to gaining information that would help them adapt to life in a new country. For most participants, involvement in these communities was temporary and they grew to be more selective when forming their social circle based on previous experiences and their own changing needs.

Maar natuurlijk, het is belangrijk om vanaf het begin een sociaal netwerk op te bouwen, want zo leer je alles over de plek. Op die manier kunnen we onze weg vinden en krijg wat je nodig hebt. Zonder zal alles moeilijk lijken. [But certainly, it is important to establish a social network from the start because that is how you learn everything about the place. That is how we want to navigate and get what you need, and if you do not have that, everything is going to seem difficult]. (Thomas, male, 69 years)

One participant described how, after fully enjoying his established leisure-focused retirement at the beach, he began to develop a need for a 'real life' which, for him, marked the end of the beach period.

In de bar zitten, een biertje drinken en zonder echte sociale contacten, het uitgaansleven en het strand. In de eerste paar jaar is het allemaal lange leven het plezier; het is de honeymoon periode zolang de stemming goed is. Maar dan komt de realiteit, en je moet een echt leven creëren, wat dat ook mag zijn. [Sitting in the bar, drinking a beer and lacking real social relations, the nightlife and the beach. It is a lot of fun in

the first few years; it is the honeymoon period as long as the mood is good. But reality cuts in, and you have to create a normal life, whatever that might be]. (Simon, male, 75 years)

Another participant described a certain discomfort as the beach lifestyle became routine and he felt an increasing need for structure and a return to a sense of real life.

Ik had niet verwacht dat alles hetzelfde zou zijn als in Nederland; dat is natuurlijk niet het geval, maar ik was me er ook niet van bewust dat alles zou veranderen. In het begin was ik, net als velen, het leven aan het leven, genoot van het weer, elke dag naar het strand; het leek eindeloos. Maar dit alles wordt anders zodra de mist optrekt en alles normaal wordt. [I did not expect everything to be the same as in the Netherlands; that, of course, is not the case, but I was not aware either that it would all change. In the beginning, I was, of course, also like many others living life, enjoying the weather, every day to the beach; it seemed endless. But all of this becomes different once the mist clears and everything becomes normal]. (Victor, male, 72 years)

Real-life period

Although the communities they joined on arrival initially proved helpful, participants experienced disappointment in the social relationships in these communities. When participants stayed part of these communities, they took some contacts for granted. As they became more selective about their social circle, most found they lacked genuine relationships. The absence of other immigrants from the Global North in their surroundings, language and cultural barriers to connecting with local people, and limited occasions to meet other people, restricted their choices for finding new social contacts.

Richard, who retired and migrated 5-years before, explained that after the first year in Thailand, his social contacts were reduced to brief encounters in the village: “*Je maakt niet echt contact; ja, je maakt een kort gesprek over waarom ze hier wonen of zoiets, maar meestal*

is dat alles, dus het kan een beetje eenzaam zijn. [You do not really connect; yes, you make a brief conversation on why they live here or something, but that usually is all, so it can be kind of lonely]” (Richard, male, 82 years). Participants often related their leisure retirement lifestyle to their access to social groups. Isabelle felt that once she no longer participated in the nightlife, it became much harder to meet other people: “*Ik ga niet naar de bar, dus ik ontmoet geen andere mensen. Ik denk dat je, om andere westerse mensen te ontmoeten, deel moet uitmaken van het uitgaansleven. [I do not go to a bar, so I do not meet other people. I think in order to meet other Western migrants, you should be part of the bar life]”* (Isabelle, female, 71 years).

While living in Thailand, participants better understood their new environment. They frequently described their initial misjudgements.

Dat eerste jaar is er geen wolkje aan de lucht; het is een beetje naïef. Ik weet zoveel door mijn ervaring met veel reizen, maar eigenlijk weet je niets. Als je hier komt wonen, leer je hoe het echte leven is. [That first year, there is no cloud in the sky (i.e., no worries); it is a little naïve. I knew so much from my experience of travelling a lot, but in fact, you know nothing. If you come and live here, you will learn what real life is like]. (Isaac, male, 72 years)

Such experiences often involved situations in which participants were confronted with cultural differences or the necessity to be self-reliant, which contributed to their understanding and knowledge of their host culture. Participants who lost some independence depended on Thai nationals whom they paid for various forms of informal care and assistance.

Becoming established and connected

Despite their intention to establish a lifestyle of leisure in their retirement, participants experienced the routines they created at this time as temporary. Participants found they had different needs relating to where they lived, or felt better when participating in daily routines, which was the opposite of spending most of their time on leisure occupations. One participant stated: “*Ik zit elke dag op het strand, geniet van mijn boeken,*

soms begin ik het gevoel te krijgen dat ik iets zou moeten doen! [I am sitting on the beach every day, enjoying myself with my books, sometimes I start to get the feeling that I should be doing something!]” (William, male, 69 years). As their migration-related occupations stabilized and daily life felt routine, participants started to sense a lack of purpose in how they occupied their time and sought a more satisfying and meaningful lifestyle. A minority of them took action, such as moving away from tourist areas, that could fit their new desired needs.

As the challenges created by migrating faded over time, the transition into retirement became more apparent. Participants expected to engage in occupations such as volunteering to teach English, giving driving lessons, teaching piano, or contributing their skills to their new community and making contacts with the Thai population. On different levels, most participants were actively engaged in charitable occupations, ranging from providing food for a family in their community, paying for dental care of strangers, letting people live for free in their real-estate investments, and contributing to the construction and upkeep of schools through fundraising and donations. Some participants found meaning in doing part-time online work when asked by a former employer.

A barrier to finding meaningful occupations was retirement visa limitations, meaning retirees were not allowed to participate in paid or volunteer work.

Ik manage altijd projecten. Kort gezegd, het is hetzelfde in het leven voor mij, het leven zien als een project. Ik wil op bepaalde tijden ontstaan omdat ik dingen gedaan wil krijgen. Anders verlies je je besef van tijd, snap je wat ik bedoel, je zou 24 uur per dag kunnen winkelen, en dat is gebeurd. Maar het maakte mijn hoofd rommelig, en ik kon niet meer doen wat ik wilde doen. Ik denk dat je veel dingen niet meer goed doet zolang je een bepaalde regelmaat in het leven hebt, en de toekomst hoeft niet veel te zijn zolang er bepaalde eindpunten zijn, dat is voor mij erg prettig. [I always manage projects. In short, it is the same in life for me, approaching life as a project. I want to get up at certain times because I

want to get things done. Otherwise, you lose your notion of time, you know what I mean, you could shop 24 hours a day, and that happened [to me]. But it made my head messy, and I could no longer do what I wanted to do, I think you stop doing a lot of things correctly as long as you manage a certain regularity in life, and the future does not have to be much. As long as there are certain endpoints, that is very pleasant for me]. (Arie, male, 76 years)

Once he got the chance, one participant returned to work for a few hours a week, which allowed him to keep a part of his identity and simultaneously find pleasure as a retiree: “*I could have said no, I have retired. This is just because I could continue to have a steer finger in the pot, feel alive in all my old business with old contacts, and still be retiring sitting in the sun*” (Sebastiaan, male, 74 years). Sam recalled how he had battled depression since he had nothing to do. One day, he showed up at a local market and started selling fruit at one of the Thai market stalls.

Nou, vier maanden geleden ben ik begonnen op een markt om Thaise mensen te helpen, maar 2-3 uur, maar dat doet me goed. Mensen waarderen je; ze willen weten of ik Thais kan spreken; ze testen je; mensen zijn erg open en vertellen je alles. [Well, 4 months ago, I started at a market helping Thai people, just 2-3 hours, but that makes me well. People appreciate you; they would like to know if I can speak Thai; they are testing you; people are very open and tell you everything]. (Sam, male, 71 years)

Before becoming established and connected, participants experienced restricted occupational engagement that negatively affected their health, resulting in problems such as weight gain due to inactivity, unhealthy eating and drinking habits, and feeling depressed or lonely due to not having anything to do. Some participants reflected on the previous period, when their daily lives revolved primarily around leisure pursuits, as a period that did not feel like real life.

Participants found that a daily routine could create more cohesion in their daily lives and enable them to do occupations that were important to them. Participants often engaged in occupations that were familiar from before migration to structure their day, thus promoting physical and mental health. *“Toen het huis klaar was, moest ik iets te doen hebben; ik begon me nerveus en geïrriteerd te voelen, ik werd sneller boos, dat soort dingen, ik zit in een kleine depressie. [When the house was done, I had to have something to do; I started to feel nervous, irritated, I get angry more easily, that kind of stuff, I am in a small depression]”* (Sam, male, 71 years). Other participants shared how they proactively maintained their physical health through occupations such as purchasing a bicycle, taking morning walks, and joining a gym. Notably, the last two occupations also facilitated social connections, which participants recognized as an additional benefit.

Thoughts on health and future

Changes in health and family situations, along with potential future changes, influenced participants' actions and, in some cases, led them to rethink their decision to retire abroad. Although no serious health issues were apparent among the participants, a minority mentioned they had hired caregivers to help them in daily occupations such as cleaning, shopping for groceries, gardening, and minor assistance in personal care due to reduced mobility. The participants self-financed the assistance they received and characterized their relationships with their paid informal caregivers as friendships. An example of one participant's concern was that if it was necessary for him to migrate back due to his physical health issues, he could not receive in the Netherlands the same level of formal caregiving services offered in Thailand. Other worries that prompted participants to consider migrating back were their family and social ties.

Eén van mijn twee kinderen praat niet meer met me. Ik moest mijn banden met Nederland volledig verbreken -om naar Thailand te emigreren-. Ik wil niet terug naar Nederland. Mijn ouders leven niet meer, mijn

dochter zegt dat ze het druk heeft en niet voor me kan zorgen. [One of my two children no longer speaks with me. I had to cut my ties with the Netherlands completely in order to migrate to Thailand—I do not want to go back to the Netherlands. My parents are no longer alive, my daughter says she is busy and will not take care of me]. (Richard, male, 82 years)

Some participants had concerns that if they were to suffer cognitive problems in the future, they might not meet the Thai migration regulations criteria for residence. Two participants expressed worries about their cognitive capacities at an older age, particularly related to filing for the yearly visa extension. Despite these concerns, participants did not actively plan to re-migrate back to their country of origin. However, they harboured anxieties about their capacity to remain in Thailand under the current and future migration policies.

How will I be able to handle this [completing the paperwork for a visa extension] when I am 80 years old? ... there is a lot of paperwork every year, and I am not good at it. I just do not know if I can manage. (Anton, male, 71 years)

One participant experienced a role change, becoming a grandfather, which made him consider re-migrating.

Ik heb een zoon, ze zeiden altijd dat ze geen kinderen wilden, en ze hielden zich aan hun woord tot een paar jaar geleden, toen er een ongelukje gebeurde en een prachtige kleinzoon werd geboren. Maar toen was ik al hier. Ik had mijn huis niet meer, dus dat is dat. Ik mis hem wel. [I have a son. They always said they did not want any children, and they kept their word until a few years ago, when an accident happened, and a beautiful grandson was born. But then I was already here. I no longer had my home, so that is it. I do miss him.] (Bert, male, 82 years)

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the experience of co-occurring occupational transitions,

retirement and migration, among retirees from Europe who migrated to Thailand. The findings provided insight into a dynamic process, with one or other of the transitions dominant at different times. The findings also showed that occupational transitions of retirement and migration were intertwined when co-occurring. The interconnected nature of retirement and migration aligns with literature illustrating how retirement decisions are increasingly intertwined with migratory choices (Savaş et al., 2023), and earlier reports that older adults' decisions to relocate are influenced by socioeconomic factors and personal aspirations (Warnes & Williams, 2006). That participants' retirement plans and confidence to migrate were based on prior experiences and skills gained pre-retirement is also supported by previous reports that a person's pre-retirement job significantly affects the different periods of transitioning to retirement (Eagers et al., 2018). Thus personal and social factors, occupational engagement, and the interaction between work and retirement are influential in the retirement transition process.

Overcoming migration challenges and seeking new meaning

According to Rowles (2008), meaning is found in experiences through doing, being, and communicating with others. The majority of participants questioned what to do next once they were no longer engaged in occupations related to migration. As their new situation became predictable and less challenging after a few years, with little to no occasion to meet new people and experience new things, they found they were looking for meaning in life. The occupations they were engaged in to overcome the challenges of migration replaced their occupational engagement experienced in work. Later in the process, occupations to support the transition of migration were not replaced by new challenging occupations, creating restricted occupational engagement and leading participant to experience a type of freedom in retirement. This finding is in line with earlier research (Jonsson, 2011).

Occupational engagement and productivity in post-retirement migration

Jonsson (2011) found that retirees experienced freedom paradoxically; desiring a more productive part of their life that was missing after their longed-for freedom from work was achieved. The current study provides an additional dimension to the experience of paradoxical freedom. Migration created a need and opportunity for occupational engagement after the complete cessation of paid work, to manage the migration experience, yet participants wanted to be more productive and found meaning after completing their migration transition.

Participants also experienced environmental and institutionalized limitations in their possibilities for occupational engagement as retiree migrants. They were hesitant to engage in volunteer work and violate their visa conditions, although most clearly stated that they wanted to share their skills and knowledge and thought of ways to be productive. For some participants, inability to have a form of occupational engagement resulted in anxiety, loneliness, and a continuous search for things to do. Given that almost all participants were active in charitable initiatives, they longed to contribute to society and connect with their host country. This finding echoes Sunil's (2007) study of US retiree migrants in Mexico and Ahmed's (2015) study on British citizens retiring in Spain, who also wanted to use their knowledge and experience to contribute to their new communities, thus establishing themselves in the new environment. Nayar and Stanley (2015) also reported immigrants developing a sense of well-being by engaging in new occupations in a new culture.

After experiencing the first period of a leisure-like lifestyle, retirees in the current study often readjusted their lives after the transition of migration reached a plateau. They established a 'real life' of health-promoting occupations in which daily structure and exercise, which better aligned with the healthy lifestyle habits to which the majority aspired. Regular commitment in retirement is closely related to experiencing well-being in daily life (Jonsson et al., 2000). Their health-promoting occupations varied from losing weight by eating healthier, managing drinking habits, going for long

walks, to running, cycling, or fitness in a gym. As Jonsson et al. (2000) pointed out, commitment to regular physical exercise is associated with experiencing well-being in daily life. The motivation to participate in health-promoting occupations mentioned by participants was not only to feel fit physically but also to remain independent and continue the established leisure lifestyle for which they had migrated. Applying this personal strategy is effective, as studies show physical exercise is a key component of healthy aging (Hupin et al., 2015). Going out to engage in physically demanding occupations also helped participants make a sense of their new environment, which is a neglected aspect of research on migration (Johansson et al., 2013).

Social loneliness and network disruption in post-migration adjustment

After migrating, most participants found themselves in situations where they could not fall back on a supportive network. This was mostly noticed in the beginning of the co-occurring transitions, when participants were new to their physical and social environment. Earlier studies also explain social loneliness, wherein migration has disrupted or transformed existing networks, and new social connections are not yet developed (Koelet & Valk, 2016; Zontini, 2006). Additionally, literature shows that proficiency in the language of the host country is one of the most important factors in having a sense of belonging (Torkington, 2015). Many studies of language proficiency show that retiree migrants lack local language fluency. The experience of being unable to fall back on a supportive network contributed to concerns most participants had about their health, especially regarding their later cognitive health in relation to being independent and being able to stay in Thailand.

The challenges in the early co-occurring transitions formed the perception of later periods in the co-occurring transitions. Learning more about their new context, participants reconsidered the needs and goals of retirement migration, which partly confirms the suggestion that later-life migration involves a complex renegotiation of place, occupation, and identity (Johansson et al., 2013). Occupational experiences during migration might be transferred to

retirement. Therefore, occupational transitions could change the expected or intended outcome of the other when co-occurring.

Methodological Considerations

Some interviews were conducted digitally via video calls due to the travel restrictions in Thailand during the COVID-19 pandemic. Krouwel et al. (2019) noted that in-person interviews have a marginal superiority over video call interviews. Quality of the video interviews was improved by paying constant attention to the participants, formulating the questions clearly, having eye contact, and asking follow-up questions to make sure that the optimal responses were achieved. Sharing a similar background with participants provided valuable insights into their values and cultural experiences, enhancing the depth of understanding in the study. However, it is also important to remain mindful of potential biases this shared background might introduce. This shared cultural background and personal experience of the first author may have influenced the data gathering and analysis processes.

Having predominantly Dutch participants limits the applicability of findings, as does only 5 of the 21 participants being women (Kim & Moen, 2002), underscoring the importance of including a more varied demographic in subsequent research. Moreover, the participants were mostly from the central part of Thailand. Recruiting individuals living in different parts of Thailand might have revealed different experiences. The study was completed during several lockdowns, which could have impacted participants' experiences. Nonetheless, the 21 participants provided rich data for analysis.

Participants were at different stages in their occupational transition at the time of interview, with some having lived in Thailand for more years than those who immigrated more recently. This variation enriched the data and findings. Participants with over a decade of post-retirement migration experience offered unique insights into the long-term adaptation process, highlighting the ongoing need for social engagement and purpose to maintain well-being over time.

Conclusion

The dynamic interplay of retirement and migration transitions unfolds across four phases: beach period, real-life period, becoming established and connected, and thoughts on health and future period. Initially, migration dominates as retirees adjust to new environments but, as they establish themselves, the focus shifts toward adapting to retirement. Over time, thoughts of returning to their country of origin began to surface, illustrating the ongoing nature of these transitions. Experiences in the process of the migration transition can modify the desired outcomes of the retirement transition. Occupations that are advanced in one transition can, at the same time, benefit the other transition.

This study contributes to knowledge in occupational science by examining how two major life transitions—retirement and migration—interact and influence one another. Through this lens, the research offers a deeper understanding of how these co-occurring transitions can shape an individual's occupational engagement and overall well-being. For example, participants who navigated the transition of migration often found that the occupations supporting their adaptation also played a critical role in redefining their post-retirement identity and purpose. This interaction between the retirement and migration transitions reveals that occupations undertaken to ease one transition can simultaneously facilitate the other, highlighting the interconnected nature of these experiences. By focusing on the interplay between these transitions, the study adds a new dimension to occupational science, demonstrating the importance of considering how multiple life changes concurrently impact participation in occupation and adaptation.

Future research on occupational transitions in retirement migration could further explore the role of occupational engagement in supporting these transitions. Studies might focus specifically on (i) the initial 'beach period', which appears to influence the trajectory of later stages by setting a foundation for adaptation; (ii) the unique challenges of later periods, particularly when health issues arise with age and require new forms of support; and (iii) the experiences

of retirees who choose to return to their home country, offering insights into the reversibility of this transition. Future studies could also further enhance understanding of retirement migration by examining how cultural and societal factors such as social class, privilege, and occupational transitions shape retirees' experiences. Examining these areas could provide a fuller understanding of how retirees adapt to and manage each phase of the retirement migration journey, enriching support strategies for future retirees.

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The authors report no financial or other conflicts of interest.

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