

## **Aspirations for a better life? Cultural change and social practices of time in migrants from Cuba and Bulgaria in the UK and Spain (BETTERTIMES)**

The struggle between the need to save the economy or people lives in the current pandemic invites us to the critical question of what role time plays in the experience of being. The subjective and social dimension of time is an ongoing discussion in which human mobility studies contribute to unpacking societal challenges worldwide. The transnational networks, services and resources across borders highlight the challenges to Europe's democratisation by bringing together an increasingly multicultural and multilingual set of populations. Migrants' subjective past, present and future experiences are not homogenous collective construction. This fact counteracts mainstream migration research focused on stereotypical categorisations around migrants' self-realisation. The project will seek to produce a novel approach to the extensive literature of lifestyle migration by applying this concept to migrants from developing countries which has not yet been investigated. BETTER TIMES will approach this puzzle by exploring migrants lived and embodied social practices of the time in the search for and experience of a "meaningful life"<sup>1</sup>, beyond the purely economic/monetary motivations, answering two main questions:

1. How do individual "time work"<sup>2</sup> aspirations and experiences change seeking a better life after migration?
2. What are the cultural practices of time contributions in achieving a more effective sustainable welfare and migration policy?

**Focus of the project:** BETTER TIMES focuses on the relationship between lifestyle migration and temporal experiences as critical factors to unfold societal change. It argues the need for a reflexive epistemology in addressing how migration shapes dispositions, opportunities and outcomes. Ultimately, the project opens a new field of research on cultural transformation while contributing to comparative politics and human mobility studies. To achieve this goal, BETTER TIMES will offer innovative data and empirical research through four concrete objectives:

1. Establish a new theoretical framework about lifestyle migration, seeking how this concept applies to migrants from developing countries like Bulgaria and Cuba.
2. Analyse the clashes and fusions when migrants from both countries modify and customise their lifestyle and temporal experience in the destination countries.
3. Evaluate the migrant's counter-narratives that emerge when comparing the aspirations for a better life and temporal patterns in Europe with their previous experiences in countries of origin.
4. Provide recommendations to social policies by highlighting the relevance of time and cultural changes in human mobility processes.

I will use systematic literature reviews, digital ethnology and visual sociology to analyse social media, blogs and migrant's self-documentation data to obtain dynamic constructions of personal experience displayed in those formats. Migrants' proficiency in internet usage, their daily lives within transnational spaces that require the development of information and communication skills suggest the value of online research during and after the pandemic context.

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<sup>1</sup>I will understand a "meaningful life" as a notion that binds time and relational goods (social assets co-produced by mutual agreement) as a precondition of happiness and life fulfilment. This definition is essentially dynamic, which is vital to understand changes in social practices of time and the search for a better life understood beyond utilitarian motivations within the process of migration.

<sup>2</sup>Time work discusses the relational character of temporal agency, stressing the people's negotiations, preferences and choices with familiar or unfamiliar temporality norms. It also highlights the dimensions of time work associated with personal relationships, organisational affiliations, and cultural heritage. This concept defines the intentional alteration of temporal experience. Instead of assuming that time simply happen to individuals, the analysis of temporal agency reverses the direction of the causal arrow to show how people make time happen.

I will seek the main parameters for migrants in assessing a good and valuable life, by analysing the fusions and clashes between Cuban and Bulgaria migrant' cultural orientations and life trajectories in the different countries contexts at stake by scrutinising:

a) What temporal patterns in Spain and the UK have fused, collide or integrated into a new fashion in migrant's everyday life experiences.

b) the negotiations between previous and current temporal experiences, highlighting what kinds of time work aspirations and choices migrants engage in after migration in achieving life improvement.

c) the narratives emerging from migrants' experiences around time emancipation and better standards of living in Western Europe in opposition to past and present socialist regimes.

The fieldwork will require extensive organisation and dedication to address the changes in migrants' temporal experiences and everyday life in the receiving countries and examine how their expectations, choices and aspirations toward past and present time patterns differ. Recruitment of interviewees for in-depth interviews (at least 15 individuals in each country) will happen through organised community groups offering support to these populations, migrant's associations and personal contacts, ensuring diversity (gender, age, educational-occupational status). I will select the more contrasting interviewees cases in order to conduct a focus group (5-7 participants) and cover the variegated narratives across the two countries under examination.