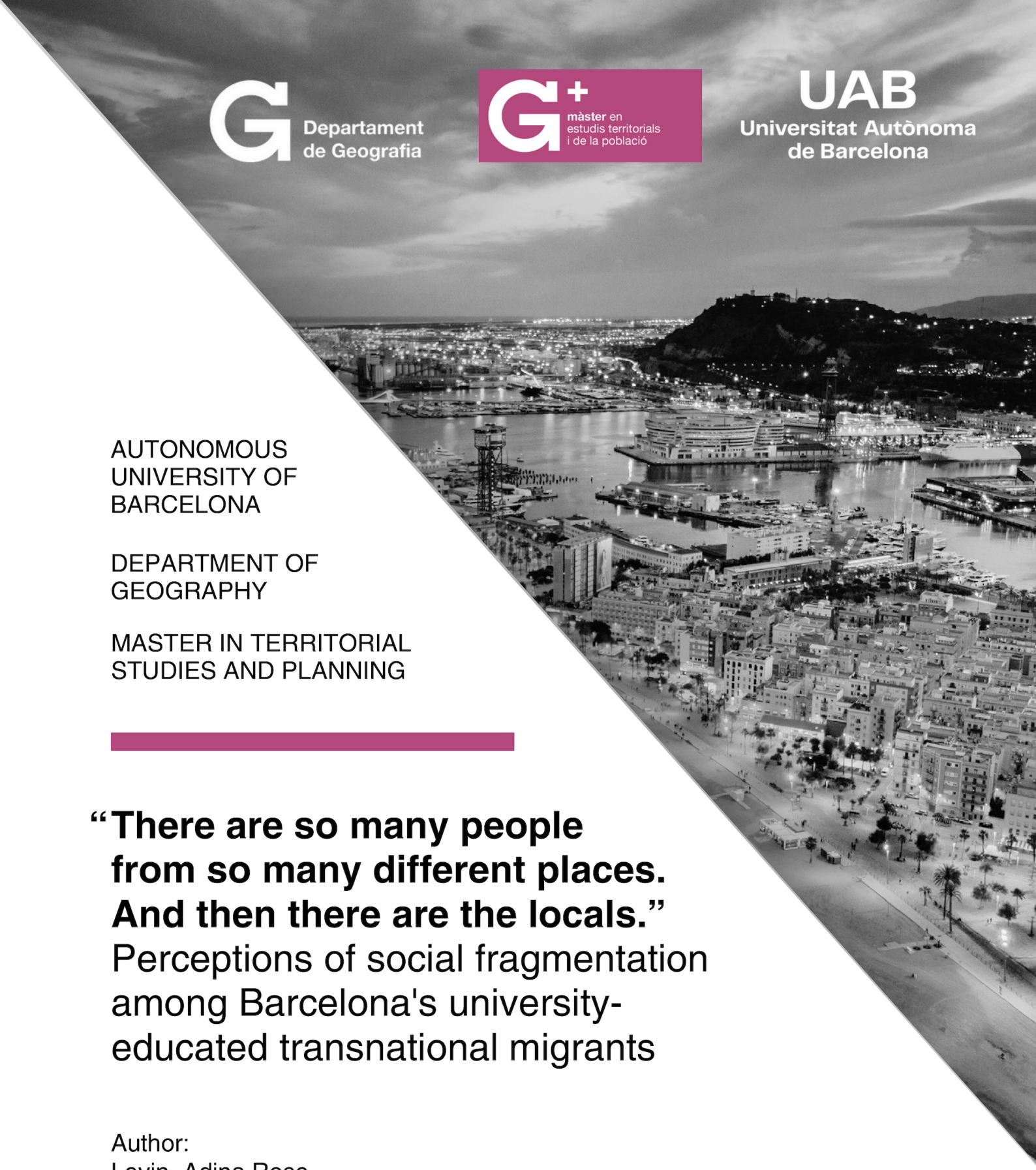

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# "There are so many people from so many different places. And then there are the locals." Perceptions of social fragmentation among Barcelona's university-educated transnational migrants


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# SUMMARY

This study delves into the complex nature of transnational university-educated migration in Barcelona, shedding light on various factors that shape migrants' experiences and lead to social fragmentation. While previous research has primarily categorized migrants based on educational profiles, this paper argues that relative socioeconomic and sociolinguistic classes on a global scale significantly influence migrants' opportunities and privileges within the city, particularly in relation to the receiving non-migrant community. By expanding the understanding of migration dynamics, this study also expands the notion of foreign-only spatial enclaves (Cocola-Gant & López-Gay 2020) to expose the creation of social bubbles that highlight the importance of language proficiency in social integration and professional prospects in Barcelona. The article explores these bubbles in depth to understand how these factors can either foster a successful melting pot or perpetuate divisions among linguistic and ethnic groups, ultimately impacting the city's social fabric. The findings call for increased tolerance to fully harness the potential of its diverse resident population, a comprehensive approach to urban dynamics that is crucial for fostering an inclusive and thriving future in the face of the city's rising levels of inequality and gentrification.


# 1. INTRODUCTION

Unlike 19th-century cities like Liverpool that thrived on favorable industrial production conditions, today's cities are driven by factors such as quality of life, with workers now having the advantage in consumption and companies freely choosing to locate in places that align with people's preferences for living. This trend is exemplified by cities like London attracting residents and businesses from around the world based on their appeal rather than industrial production capabilities (Glaeser 2012; 118), coinciding with a sharp rise in migrants with university educations, in contrast to previous working class migration. In a similar vein, Barcelona experienced a transformation from a post-industrial urban regeneration after the 1992 Olympic Games (Degen 2004) to a focus on real estate and tourism following the 2008 financial crisis (Aymerich 2021), which helped cement the city's spot on the world map and also paved the way for a new fragmented urban and residential scenario to take hold (Parreño-Castellano et al 2022). The city received relatively few transnational migrants until the 21st century, starting with working class migrants followed by university-educated ones (López-Gay 2014). The percentage of foreign-born residents with higher education (49.1%) currently outnumbers the university-educated Spanish-born residents (48.5%) albeit slightly (López-Gay 2023), changes which not only reflect the evolving nature of migration patterns and the growing influence of lifestyle factors in shaping city dynamics, but also threaten to exacerbate existing gentrification within Barcelona (Nel·lo 2021; Nel·lo & Donat 2017; Cocola-Gant & López-Gay 2020 and others).

This paper argues that behind the numbers lies a more nuanced picture of what a fragmented city looks like on a social scale in the eyes of these university-educated migrants in Barcelona. This research references relevant concepts in transnational migration, high-skilled migration and lifestyle migration in an attempt to show that class-based status on a global scale has a profound effect on their experience in the city, as opposed to the traditional educational divide between so-called high and low skills. This paper aims to demonstrate that these factors influence economic and social capital and, hence, opportunities within the city, where efforts to step out of comfort zones and navigate social hierarchies must be viewed

as *relative* between individuals of the hosting community and the sending communities from around the world, a social divide that goes beyond physical fragmentation. Building upon the research on foreign-only enclaves in central neighborhoods as markers of privilege (Cocola-Gant & López-Gay 2020), this study utilizes the aforementioned analysis to delineate symbolic clusters or "bubbles" that reflect perceived privileges and social status, and introduces a conceptual framework inspired by Bourdieu's work (1984) to gain insights into how these migrants position themselves in Barcelona.

Additionally, the article calls into question the notion of international social bubbles where English language is the *lingua franca* (Arvidsson & Jemstedt 2022), arguing that this vision provides an incomplete picture of the complex dynamics at play, especially in a Spanish-Catalan bilingual city like Barcelona (García et al 2006; Codó 2018). Given that language proficiency acquired through education or upbringing plays a crucial role in transnational migration, affecting social integration and professional prospects (Adsera & Pytlikova 2015), the study reveals the interconnectedness of social and cultural tensions with economic inequality and residential segregation — all of which can weaken social cohesion with the receiving community of non-migrants and hinder the city's ability to fully harness the potential of its evolving resident population.

Following this introductory overview, this article aims to conduct a comprehensive examination of theoretical concepts concerning migration, skills and global class-based divisions, complemented by a review of relevant studies on university-educated migrants in Barcelona and other regions in Europe, particularly Southern Europe. Subsequently, a qualitative case study will be presented, drawing on semi-structured interviews with 15 university-educated migrants in Barcelona representing diverse regions. By comparing their experiences, this study aims to unveil previously unexplored dynamics and relationships both among migrants as well as non-migrants. The results will be discussed in the conclusions section, supplemented by a visualization of the findings and a proposal of policy reforms, both at the urban and global levels, applicable to Barcelona and similar cities.

# 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: Migration, skills and global class-based divisions

## 2.1 Geoarbitrage meets talent arbitrage

Since the Industrial Revolution, migratory flows have played a significant role in determining the growth and demographic composition of Barcelona's population, predominantly driven by the working-class from less affluent parts of Spain, as Barcelona was seen as a place for upward social mobility (López-Gay 2014). Starting in the 1960s, Spain saw the emergence of tourism- and residential tourism-driven transnational migrants from mostly middle-class British backgrounds living in mostly coastal parts of the region (Lundström 2018; Oliver & O'Reilly 2010; O'Reilly 2002). In 1980s, there was a rise in what is currently referred to in the literature as "low-skilled" (non-university educated) migrants primarily from North Africa, followed by migrants of a similar class profile from Central and South America in the late 1990s and early 2000s (López-Gay 2016). "Highly qualified" or "high skilled" (university-educated) transnational migrants began arriving by the tens of thousands in the 2010s (López-Gay 2016 & 2023) and continue to arrive at high rates at the time of this publication (Barcelona City Council 2023).

If so-called high-skilled labor is a key condition for establishing economic activity within a city and attracting skilled labor from around the world is a key question for cities (Glaeser & Said 2003; Musterd et al 2016), then immigration is, as Richard Florida put it, "the lifeblood" of a city's skilled economy (Florida 2007; 86). However, we must remember that not all bloodlines encounter low barriers to entry into cities' economic ecosystems. This is not only in the case of Spanish immigration regimes (Fig. 1) but also because the study of migration itself is determined not on education but rather on global class, where the traditional divide between "labor migration" and "lifestyle migration" tends to replicate racialized global inequality patterns of a colonial world order (Hayes 2018 & 2021; Benson & O'Reilly 2019). In the former, the global division of labor plays a crucial role in shaping global mobility rights and influencing how different types of migrants perceive and experience their mobility (Hayes 2021). In the latter, increased mobility has allowed relatively well-off global classes, both of working age as well as retired populations, to use their accumulated capital to easily relocate to relatively lower-cost locations to engage in what Hayes termed "geoarbitrage… the lifestyle equivalent of corporate offshoring," a mindset that reflects the influence of market rationality on individuals' cultural lives (Hayes 2018; 39-59).

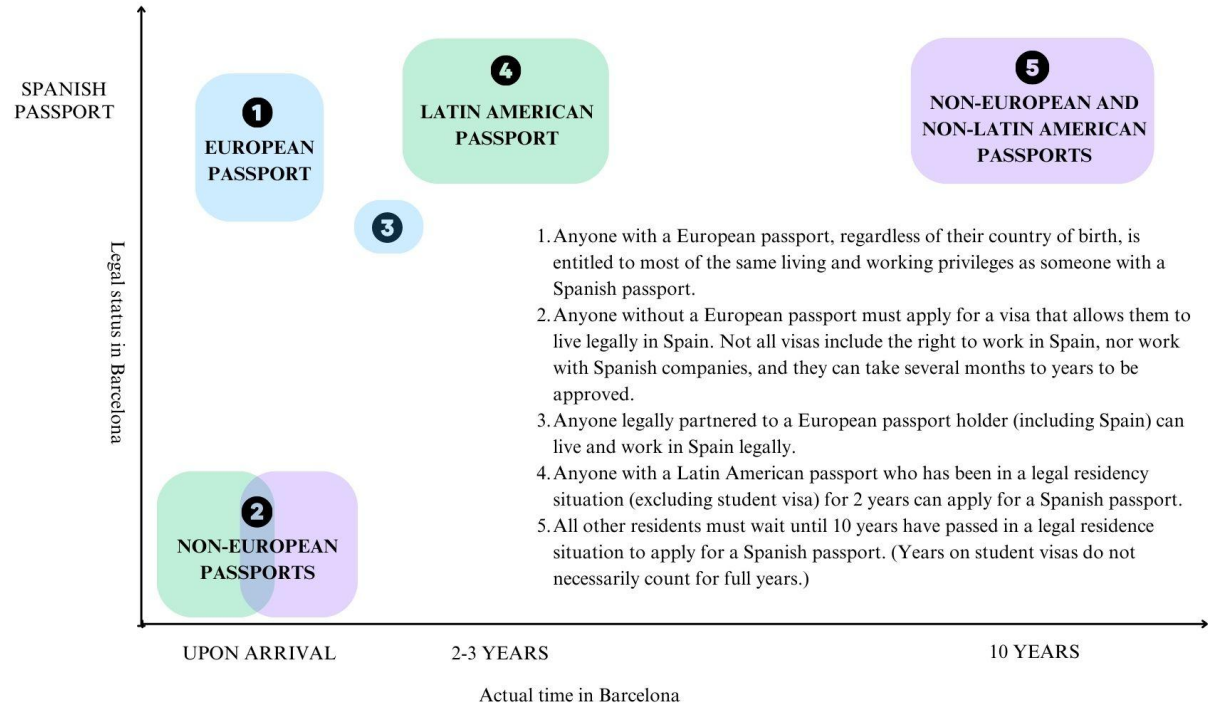


Fig 1: Simplification of passport-based immigration regimes and their legal benefits in Spain. Source: Elaborated by the author based on information from Spain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union, and Cooperation

Under this framework, lifestyle migration for a better quality of life should not be separated from other types of migration such as labor migration, nor be limited to socio-economic elites (Hayes & Zaban 2020), but rather it should feed into "migration scholarship writ large" (Hayes 2021) taking into account how individual's relative class status creates "constellations of privilege" within migration, bolstered by institutional benefits (Benson 2019; McGarrigle 2021). These migration patterns often involve movement

from North to South, as in the Global South as well as Southern Europe, with Spain as a favored destination, driven by the desire for a milder climate and often proximity to a coast (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Lilius & Balampanidis 2020; Hayes 2021), going hand-in-hand with how "lifestyle opportunities, rather than work, explain why transnational migrants are attracted to Barcelona" (Cocola-Gant & López-Gay 2020). Yet while warmer climates are conducive to more population growth (Glaeser & Said 2003; Florida 2007), they are not necessarily associated with increased economic growth (Florida 2007 citing Terry Clark 2003; 52).

On the other hand, cities themselves exploit their desired skills niche in a process of "talent arbitrage" (Florida 2007; 165) to attract profiles that they believe will make a positive contribution to their economy. To be successful, however, city positioning must coincide with actual perceptions of the city's residential population (Belabas 2023), which is itself evolving constantly with the arrival of new immigrants from all different walks of life, each of whom has different relative relationships to the city, how and with whom they engage in it. That being said, detractors of Florida's work have argued for the importance of diverse occupational groups within the framework of contemporary capitalist development over skills and/or talent, pointing to how the so-called "dealer class" of creatives is an arbitrary category of professionals that has limited influence (Krätke 2010). Furthermore, it has been concluded that regional success ultimately depends on a well-connected innovation system, equitable socio-cultural qualities and urban restructuring that prioritizes sustainability over selective gentrification (Krätke 2010); Florida later wrote at length about how his controversial vision for cities and skills had the capacity to divide and gentrify even superstar cities (Florida 2017).

Either way, cities that engage in talent arbitrage and individuals who engage in geoarbitrage are sides of the same coin: a global capital injection, with capital being both educational and financial, which can upset the status quo. However, as van Kempen 2007 and others have argued, "the *un*divided city is a myth and a utopia at the same time," emphasizing instead the importance of considering individual preferences, constraints and opportunities when analyzing divided cities, as well as the role of institutions and contingencies in shaping urban divisions. While globalization plays a significant role, it is crucial not to overlook the influence of local actors and the need to understand the specific mechanisms through which national and international forces impact cities to achieve positive urban outcomes (van Kempen 2007).

Parreño-Castellano et al. (2022) argue that Spanish cities, including Barcelona, are experiencing the emergence of a dual city, despite objections from van Kempen (2007), due to globalizing neo-liberal capitalism driven by forces such as international mobility associated with lifestyle migrants and alternative work patterns, along with escalating segregation, precariousness, evictions, and housing displacement. These developments result in intensified unequal geographical growth and increasing segregation within urban spaces, including the creation of foreign-only spatial enclaves in Barcelona (Cocola-Gant & López-Gay, 2020) as transnational gentrification further contributes to the displacement of long-term residents, as observed in Barcelona (López-Gay & Andújar Llosa, 2020; López-Gay et al. 2020). In stark contrast to melting pots, such fragmented cities are characterized by the concentration of privileged classes in economically desirable locations, while less advantaged working and service classes are left with leftover spaces (Nel·lo 2021; Nel·lo & Donat 2017), a phenomenon of that is on the rise in Barcelona and exacerbated by over-tourism and lifestyle migration, which tug at the social fabric of the

city (Jover & Díaz-Parra 2022), creating renewed urgency for qualitative work that provides new insights into these issues.

While lifestyle migrants in other, less-urban regions tend to adapt to local class hierarchies and moral expectations to integrate with middle and upper middle classes (Hayes 2021), it is unclear if this can be possible in such divided urban environments. Furthermore, while Florida pointed to Spain's tolerance of gays as an indicator of the region's overall tolerance for migrant talent (Hernández 2009), his work did not take account the racial discrimination (Oliver & O'Reilly 2010; Lundström 2018) that continues to permeate the region, as well as the rise of a somewhat controversial phenomenon of "tourismophobia" (Simas et al 2020) that goes hand-in-hand with tourism-driven lifestyle migration to Barcelona.

## 2.2 A practical state-of-the-art

Studies such as "Barcelona's Got Talent" (López-Gay, 2016) and related research on foreign-only enclaves (Cocola-Gant & López-Gay, 2020) primarily examine the spatial living arrangements of migrants, overlooking the broader impact of their presence on social dynamics within the city. Research shows that migrants can create social "bubbles" through their daily routines, which can provide support in the face of immigration challenges but also hinder their assimilation into the wider society beyond their fragmented section, resulting in a dualistic sense of belonging where migrants feel integrated within their bubble but remain strangers outside of it (Zaban, 2015). These previous studies on Barcelona also use education to distinguish these migrants from so-called "low skilled migrants" or working class migrants, whereas the theoretical frameworks discussed in the previous section merit a closer look at the relativity of privilege and socioeconomic status across the global spectrum.

Numerous studies of other parts in Spain, as well as Southern Europe at large, show that lifestyle migrants indeed tend to stick together and not integrate with locals, unless through mixed marriages (Lundström 2018). In a series of studies conducted between 2003 and 2017, O'Reilly examined the long-term effects of British individuals residing in the Costa del Sol region of Spain. The research revealed that while the majority of British residents faced challenges in integrating and formed transient or "liquid" communities, some older individuals developed strong connections to the Spanish way of life and exhibited a reluctance to return to the UK. In contrast, younger individuals successfully integrated and established networks that extended beyond national and ethnic boundaries, leaving lasting influences or "sediments" on the local ecosystem, such as increased participation of North Europeans in local politics, widespread usage of English in coastal areas, instances of successful cultural blending, and subtle shifts in attitudes, expectations and relationships (O'Reilly 2017).

This was not just the case with Britons, nor just with Spain. "Deep Swedish postcolonial identification with Anglo-Saxon and north-western European countries and cultures" compelled Swedish migrants to feel unburdened by "pressures of integration or assimilation into Spanish society" in Southern Spain (Lundström 2018), except when it came to lower local salaries, which migrants claimed were offset by a pleasant climate and an enhanced quality of life (Lundström 2018). Low local salaries also came up among Finnish offshore workers in Athens who found that their experiences did not match the lifestyle expectations of migrants from wealthier countries, making it difficult to compete in the housing market (Lilius & Balampanidis 2020), yet these studies did not mention salary numbers outright for proper

comparison on a global scheme. Similarly in Lisbon, while research has made it clear that similar migrants "benefit from the same power asymmetries within the global mobility regime," it is unclear precisely how relatively well-off they are as compared to each other as well as to the receiving community (Molina Caminero & McGarrigle 2021; McGarrigle 2021).

While some studies on lifestyle migration, such as the seminal book Gringolandia (Hayes 2018) share exact numbers for context, it is important to recognize that the capital at stake in geoarbitrage is not only economic but can be cultural and social as well (Bourdieu 1984; McGarrigle 2022), especially as creative people tend to trade 25% of potential earnings for greater freedom to pursue their interests (Florida 2007; 77). Language, culture and socialization are intertwined, as linguist John McWhorter argues that language does not shape our perception of the world (Sapir-Whorf hypothesis) but rather reflects a given culture and worldview (McWhorter 2014). Migrant studies focusing on the role of language as well as multilingualism merit (Adsera & Pytlikova 2015) increased attention given the "integration paradox," as highly educated immigrants tend to disconnect from the receiving society rather than becoming more aligned with it (Verkuyten 2016), especially among those who consider their identity to be more global and "cosmopolitan" (Geurts et al 2022).

Some lifestyle migration studies that feature multilingualism and sociolinguistic dynamics tend to revolve around learning enough of a local language to "get by," with a language's relative capital winning out in most circles and fostering a utilitarian view of languages that resembles economic geoarbitrage considerations. Yet these considerations are contingent on the relative language skills of migrants compared to the relative language skills of the receiving community, the linguistic proximity of the languages at stake and the existence of common or shared languages (Adsera & Pytlikova 2015). For example, among Swedish migrants in France, proficiency in French and English was deemed equally important for professional life, while French skills were prioritized in personal life (Arvidsson & Jemstedt 2022). As for Finnish migrants in Greece, a few respondents knew Greek but expressed interest in learning basic Greek as a way to be polite, although English proficiency among Greeks pleasantly surprised them and enabled social interactions and encounters in shops and with locals, compared to the lack of English proficiency among Spaniards who would opt for Spanish (Lilius & Balampanidis 2020).

The linguistic reality of Barcelona as an officially bilingual city of Spanish and Catalan, with the recent emergence of mostly English within foreign-only enclaves (Cocola-Gant & López-Gay 2020), further complicates matters. García et al 2006 and Codó 2018 argue that in Catalonia, different sociolinguistic regimes are imposed on foreigners based on their geographic and class origins: Whereas proficiency in Catalan is not necessary for acceptance and professional success for educated residents from industrialized areas, it restricts upward mobility for economic migrants who primarily rely on Spanish. Codó 2018's in-depth analysis of two cases, one embracing and one rejecting Catalan as part of their migrant identity, is proof that linguistic tolerance is relative, for both migrants and the host community, indicating a complicated yet unequivocal relationship between social class and social capital, integration and language-based social bubbles that will be explored in the results.

According to Adsera & Pytlikova (2015) and others, fluency in the language of the destination country is crucial for immigrants' successful integration, reducing migration costs, and improving their well-being and prospects in the local labor market. However, language barriers can have the opposite effect and

further strain the social fabric of the city in addition to factors like gentrification. In the current context of high mobility and transient stays in Barcelona (López-Gay & Andújar Llosa, 2020), and with remote work reducing the relevance of local labor markets, there are fewer incentives and less time for migrants to learn the language(s) of the destination country, further complicating an already complex social landscape for both migrants and non-migrants.

# 3. Methods and data analysis

## 3.1 Methods and sampling

Whereas previous quantitative and mixed methods studies focused on Barcelona's foreign-only spatial enclaves, this study provides a qualitative look at the dynamics and divisions within and across these social bubbles through semi-structured interviews with 15 individuals representing diverse segments of the city's university-educated migrant population, one-on-one to encourage trust and guarantee confidentiality. Interviews were conducted in the period November-December 2022, primarily in English (two in Spanish and one in a mix of English and Spanish; some Catalan was used as well), and lasted between 90 and 120 minutes. They took place in person throughout the metropolitan region of Barcelona, half at participants' homes and half at coffee shops or quiet parts of restaurants, as well as one virtual interview through Google Meet.

The criteria for participant selection were broad, considering factors such as upbringing outside of Spain, graduation from accredited universities, working age, native and learned languages and current residence in the Barcelona metro area. By adopting these criteria, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the ranging and relative perceptions of Barcelona's university-educated migrants, potentially covering previously unexplored aspects of the so-called high-skilled migrant or lifestyle migrant profile.

Participants were recruited through online calls in English for participation, both public and private, as well as through one snowball referral. The resulting sample (see Appendix. Fig. 1) encompassed a diverse range of participants in terms of age, gender, citizenship status (EU, non-EU and acquisition of EU citizenship during their lives). Participants hailed from various countries and regions across the world, however, the sample did not include anyone originally from East and Southeast Asia, Oceania or the United States and Canada. Their time spent living in Barcelona also varied. The sample also exhibited variation in marital status, dependents, prior experience living abroad, and professional work, including full-time, part-time, unemployed, self-employed, and entrepreneurial engagements with local and remote companies. While most participants tended to come from middle-class backgrounds in their home regions, notably, participants' current income levels varied, with some earning well below the Barcelona average of 32.324€ per year (Barcelona City Council 2021), others around the average, and well above it, including one outlier with a six-figure income. These factors contribute to significant variation in the study's results, which will be explored in subsequent sections, in an attempt to pave the way for further research on these important variables that can shape relative privilege and perceptions thereof.

## 3.2 Data analysis and materials

The semi-structured one-on-one interviews covered a range of topics related to the participants' backgrounds, the decision to migrate, the choice of Barcelona as their destination, their experiences and identities as residents, interactions with the local community and plans for the future. Relevant follow-up questions were included for each of these topics (Gerson & Demaske 2020). All interviews were recorded on the researcher's smartphone, transcribed with researcher supervision in Otter.ai and Happy Scribe in the days following the interviews, with redundancies removed, though most instances of spoken and verbal errors in English maintained to preserve their authenticity and showcase the fluency spectrum of the participants. They were then uploaded to Atlas.ti for analysis, which involved both deductive codes derived from the interview questions ("upbringing," "Barcelona imaginaries," "Catalan") and inductive codes and memos ("Ecosystems of BCN," "Native English," "segregation") that emerged during the interviews. All interviews were coded manually in March-April and re-reviewed in June for further analysis, with the main results in the subsequent section.

Regional data on all participants was generalized to the United Nations geoscheme to protect the confidentiality of the participants, and income data was divided into brackets as well. Names were changed for the same reason as well as to provide additional context regarding their origins when possible. It is also important to acknowledge that this research was conducted by a university-educated migrant from a relatively affluent background who is a native speaker of English and fluent in Spanish and Catalan, which may have influenced participants' responses and the subsequent analysis.

# 4. Results: Social unity and fragmentation among Barcelona's university-educated migrants

## 4.1 Active melting pots

### 4.1.1 Some in English and some in Spanish

Similar to previous literature on lifestyle migration (Zaban 2015; Lundström 2019 and others), many but not all of the Barcelona participants interviewed had active individual friendships as well as friend groups that are "*almost exclusively international… and we speak more or less in English,*" as ILSE from Western Europe said. The event Barcelona International Community Day, run by the Barcelona City Council, served as a space where migrants who arrived more recently to the city tend to meet, like YAEL from the Middle East and IVANKA from Eastern Europe who struck up a friendship. While these initiatives may attract newer potentially "liquid" or transient profiles (O'Reilly 2017), as opposed to longer-term residents, foreign-based bubbles existed among participants who had been in the city longer, like DAVID, from Central America, who shared "*It's not just that I only have foreign friends, but also that my foreign friends only have foreign friends."* European ILSE elaborated that these groups serve to reinforce each other, adding that international people "*are here because there are many international people living here and many international people makes them come here again*," a self-perpetuating cycle regardless of their time spent residing in the city (O'Reilly 2017).

Beyond friendship, participants also sought out services within English-language social circles, with the example of BRIAN, from Northern Europe, who found his Israeli therapist thanks to Barcelona Metropolitan, which calls itself "Barcelona's magazine in English." Despite her growing Spanish skills, YAEL, who learned English growing up in addition to the native languages from her region of the Middle East, was relieved to be able to speak to *"official"* people about immigration in English at no additional cost to her from the Barcelona International Welcome Desk, another initiative from the Barcelona City Council, as opposed to English-speaking lawyers who charged 900€ plus tax for similar services. At the time of our interview, YAEL was not yet a fiscal resident of Spain but was able to take advantage of these public services offered by the city, calling into question who the city's services are for (Jover & Díaz-Parra 2020). Online sites boasting a high presence of English speakers was enough to convince IVANKA, who was originally from Eastern Europe but had been living in English-speaking Northern Europe for many years, to move to Barcelona with her partner, who speaks Spanish because his family is from a part of Spain. However, throughout our interview she expressed an uncomfortable dependency on him having to translate many encounters with other people in the city.

Similar to results in Adsera & Pytlikova 2015, familiarity with the Spanish language and culture made Barcelona a strategic choice for some of the participants. In the case of native Spanish speakers, YOSELIN and her daughter had followed Spanish TV at home in the Caribbean; TOMÁS felt that Spanish humor was very similar to that of his home country in Latin America; JOHANNA, who was originally from Western Europe but had learned Spanish in Latin America, wanted her Latin American husband to have a European university experience in Spanish. Spanish language also drew non-native speakers as well, like YAEL:*"I used to be able to speak Spanish when I was young, like I don't know, 12 years old, because of telenovelas."* Similarly, MARTINA, originally from Slovakia, had learned Spanish previously as a master's student in Barcelona and the idea that Spanish was something *"easy"* that they could *"pick up again"* — a utilitarian view of both Spanish and English being commonly taught languages (Adsera & Pytlikova 2015) that would imply a smaller cultural leap or time investment that factored into their geoarbitrage process (McGarrigle 2021; Hayes 2018). This would come up later in contrast to participants' experience with Catalan.

The nationalities in the English-language circles were mostly, though not always, restricted to Europeans or Anglo Saxon profiles, as migrants mentioned friendships with people from Turkey, Brazil and Iran, with whom the common language they shared was English. For example, HASSAN from North Africa lit up when *"we found a fantastic cosmopolitan city, where we were going out, we're meeting with people, with French, with English, with Americans, with Canadians, with Africans."* A similar concept came up with YOSELIN from the Caribbean, who called Barcelona a *"European New York, a cosmopolitan city,"* though she admitted missing speaking English as the last time she needed to speak the language was at an event run by a European entity.

This *"cosmopolitan"* English-based circle (Geurts et al 2022) was in contrast to other mixed groups of internationals that included people from Central and South America as well as Spain, where the common language was Spanish. PAOLO, from Southern Europe, had colleagues at the large multinational where he works are mostly from South America and, despite learning Catalan before Spanish because of his ex-girlfriend, he said that most of his time was spent in Spanish with those contacts and some English with others. JOHANNA came to Barcelona earlier than most other participants with her Latin American

ex-boyfriend, who introduced her to other Latin Americans in Barcelona with whom she became involved in cycling; most of her friendships seemed to take place in Spanish as well. NOVAK had lived in his home of Southeastern Europe until taking a job in Barcelona and had enrolled in Spanish classes before arriving in the city. When we spoke, he had been working mostly in English for a large multinational tech firm but shared that his major friend groups include *"Italian, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil"* mostly in Spanish, thanks to his Spanish partner, indicating an overlap with a segment of Barcelona's receiving community, which will be discussed in section 4.4. The Spanish-English divide was further evident in the case of TOMÁS, who was originally from Latin America and grew up at a bilingual English school: *"My workout group, for example, is full of international people. And they usually feel more comfortable in English. So we switched to English there. Most of them also know some Spanish but they feel more comfortable in English,"* though when referring to his friend group from Argentina and Colombia as well as a Spanish couple, he did not specifically use the word *"international"* to describe them, indicating a shift in social circles.

### 4.1.2 Top status to native English

BRIAN from Northern Europe coined an *"implicit English bias"* like so: *"The more English you speak, the more status you have."* Yet participants put native English speakers like BRIAN and CHARLOTTE, also from Northern Europe, in an entirely different, even more exclusive community of its own similar to O'Reilly's findings (2003-2017). As NOVAK, who spoke multiple Slavik languages in addition to English and Spanish, put it bluntly: *"My best friend told me It's very hard to enter with a group of English people. If you're not English, you're just furniture. They will go out with you after work. But to kind of have a relation with that person, like a friendship, it's very hard because you're not English person,"* which is one of the reasons NOVAK said that he took a job in Barcelona over London. CHARLOTTE, who worked in English language instruction in Catalonia for decades, agreed that language and identity were intertwined, with the her relationships were somewhat strained with non-native English speakers:

> *"I find that when I speak to people where English is already their second language, or maybe their third, I'm back in the classroom because I'm having to control the language so that they understand. I don't find it relaxing. There's the native English, and then there's the Global English is a much reduced format, much reduced vocabulary, much-reduced structures that the international community are using. And that's what the children are using to meet with each other. It's a poorer English. My English has become poorer here because I'm not speaking to natives enough but I read to keep the vocabulary going."*

While Global English (McClum 2003) is a downgrade for native English speakers like CHARLOTTE and BRIAN, other participants with personal and professional connections to native English speakers and Anglosphere institutions, specifically, felt like they had earned additional status for having been surrounded by native English speakers. For IVANKA, graduating from an Anglosphere university *"is very recognized in her home country"* in Eastern Europe and she eventually pursued citizenship there. French-speaking JEAN LUC credited his English to having studied abroad, particularly in North America, where he "*put [his] level even higher"* thanks to his native English-speaking roommates. For HASSAN, he and his wife had worked for over a decade at a North American company in their home country in North Africa and he credited North Americans in general for *"fantastic service"* that helped he and his wife migrate to Barcelona. For MARTINA from Eastern Europe, it wasn't just traveling abroad to learn

English that was important but rather positioning herself with frequent mentions to her North American husband throughout our conversation, like *"oftentimes when I speak to my father about [how] I live a certain life, which is here with [a North American] man and a child that has a dual citizenship. I cannot ever be the girl in [Eastern Europe] because I got all these opportunities. I can't throw it away."* That being said, none of these alliances necessarily afforded them higher-paying jobs in Barcelona, not for the native speakers nor the other participants in this study, similar to findings from Lilius & Balampanidis 2020 and others.

The English *"CV improvement"* BRIAN mentioned also extended to both non-migrants as well. *"It's almost an aspirational thing here,"* given the lack of a high standard of English in Catalonia that he as well as others perceived, similar to the experiences of other migrants to Spain as opposed to other countries like Greece (Lundström 2018), causing non-migrants to frequently switch to the native Spanish out of comfort. Furthermore, BRIAN mentioned hearing racist remarks from his Catalan neighbor about immigrants from poorer, non-European countries: *"the people that [my neighbor] was aspiring to be… the upper crust of elite, British society… [those people] looked down at her for being Spanish… as though she's some kind of lesser being."* Native English speakers were considered, both by others and themselves, to be privy to a relatively higher position than others, both migrants as well as non-migrants in Barcelona, who learn English in a classroom setting.

## 4.2 Avoiding their respective nationalist bubble

Many participants expressed "making the effort" to disengage the bubbles of their fellow countrymen, differing from literature on nationalistic-based communities (Lundstöm 2018 and others) and similar to "cosmopolitan" positionings of other migrants who distanced themselves from identities tied to their origins (Geurts et al 2023). ROSY, from Sub-Saharan Africa, felt like it was a requirement, arguing that *"If I go to my African community, I will never leave this zone of comfort. But let me go and challenge myself into other like cultures,"* which was why she wanted to live abroad in the first place. Similarly for IVANKA, *"it's very important actually"* that she had not met up with any people from her country in Eastern Europe because *"it's good to preserve your culture and still celebrate those kind of things. And maybe from time to time, but for me, like moving to another country, you have to be more open, like to all nationalities and, and not to look and like stay in your community."* Even BRIAN, who eventually partnered up with a fellow Anglosaxon from North America, seemed disappointed that he was in an *"English bubble"* as opposed to other circles within the city, similar to some transnational migrant responses in other cities (Zaban 2015 and others).

That being said, the English bubble did not bother TOMÁS, who grew up bilingual in Spanish and English in South America: *"I actually have a harder time when I'm with [South American country] that are in a bubble. When I'm with Germans playing volleyball, it means that he or she is not in a bubble, in a German bubble. Maybe they're in an international battle but they're with me they're trying."* For him, the city's social dynamics boiled down to migrants distinguishing themselves by going out of their *relative* zone of comfort and privilege (Benson 2019; McGarrigle 2021), despite only some of them making the effort to penetrate Spanish and Catalan spheres (García et al 2006; Codó 2018), which will be described in 4.4.2.

## 4.3 Who's at the bottom?

The biggest difference among participants was the speed and ease with which those with European Union (EU) passports were able to live in Barcelona as opposed to the headaches that those without EU passports had to endure — a division that participants claimed had nothing to do with their university-degree qualifications or elite qualifications but rather a function of the interpreted prestige of their passport and native language (Hayes & Zaban 2020; Hayes 2021; McGarrigle 2021 and others). As EU citizen ISLE said:

> *"You don't need an education to work in a call center. you can just come here to Barcelona to a nice sunny place, which is full of culture and international students or international people, and get a job… German, for instance, they throw jobs at you. I mean, if they fire me today, I can have three jobs tomorrow, no problem. I know that's not true for every language, but in German like extremely easy to find a job here."*

This was in stark contrast to cases like NOVAK, who had learned an entirely different Eastern European language from scratch in his mid-thirties to pass the language requirement to acquire an EU passport from that country, which would permit him to work abroad in Europe. He also purchased a SIM from that same country card out of concern that recruiters would not call him if he listed his non-EU home country phone number on his CV. DAVID also went through a lengthy process in an attempt to convert his student visa into a work visa, despite graduating from and teaching at one of the most prestigious universities in Central America, only to end up entering a domestic partnership with his partner, a South American-born Spanish national, so that he could obtain the right to live and work in Barcelona. YOSELIN and her husband, both later-career professionals at a large NGO earning top salaries in the Caribbean, agreed to forgo earning money in Spain for two years, despite the cost of living being much higher than in their home country, in order to acquire a non-lucrative visa to accompany their daughter in Barcelona at a known trade school. HASSAN grew up in relative privilege within Northern Africa, went to university in Europe and worked his way up at a multinational in his home country, yet he expressed desperation after having spent hundreds of thousands of euros on living accommodations for himself and his family. As he explained, they were tied up in various visa processing times that were put on hold and during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic due to what he claimed was anti-North African migrant racism on part of the Spanish government putting a *"sticker"* on him: *"You are from North Africa? We will not make things easier for you, talent or no talent."*

Some EU participants recognized the privileged status they had been afforded in Barcelona and referenced it as a factor for the distinction between terms like "immigrant" and "expat." As BRIAN from Northern Europe said, *"I am aware of the bias that people would say, 'I'm an expat,' but somebody from North Africa is an immigrant. It seems to be kind of racist. But no one has ever called me an immigrant to my face but I did hear 'It's great that Brian is here because you know, the whiter the better.'"* Many positioned themselves as good-faith agents within this debate, with both CHARLOTTE and JOHANNA choosing to live in migrant working-class neighborhoods in Barcelona because they preferred it but also because they had been priced out of other neighborhoods like other lifestyle migrants (Lundström 2019). As the Western European JOHANNA said, *"Strangely. I sort of like non-European immigration because European immigration really makes, for example, housing more expensive. The people here are somehow*

*more underdog and down to earth,"* clarifying that she might, in the process, could come off as a transnational gentrifier in her own neighborhood of Barcelona (Cocola-Gant & López-Gay 2023; Hayes & Zaban 2020), even though both her salary, as well as CHARLOTTE's, was lower than the Barcelona average, calling into question common narratives of gentrifier identities and the challenge of relative global socioeconomic class.

## 4.4 Stirring the pot with Barcelona lifers

### 4.4.1 Like oil and water, Catalan rising on top

When asked if they felt like "Barcelonians," participants responded in many different ways, however a clear distinction was made with regard to Barcelona's receiving community. As BRIAN said, *"I would find the term [Barcelonian] very difficult to define because there are so many people from so many different places. And then there are the locals."* Many participants made clear distinctions between life-long Barcelonians who were (1) "full-bred" Catalans born and raised in Barcelona by parents who were also born and raised in Barcelona and spoke mostly Catalan, as opposed to (2) those who were born and raised in Barcelona but to parents from other parts of Spain or other parts of the world and spoke some Catalan, and another distinction from (3) those who came to Barcelona from other parts of Spain likely did not speak Catalan, in line with migration data on Barcelona (López-Gay 2014). In this way, just as the participants themselves came from relative levels of privileged backgrounds, the term "locals" became a relative term as well related to migration.

In the minds of many participants, locals in the (1) category seemed to be exclusive circles closed off to foreigners like them, despite mixed work environments, like in JEAN LUC's case: *"They are lovely people, but they already have their life here for more than 20 years. They have already their friends, they have their family here. So spending a lot of time with them is kind of incompatible… because they will not give me so much access to their life."* DAVID, who understood Catalan and spoke native Spanish, felt similarly: *"My boss is Catalan, and I adore her, love her, and admire her. Making a Catalan friend can happen - it's not that rare. But from there, for that Catalan friend inviting you to join their group of Catalan friends, that's something else. That doesn't happen."*

Many felt that exclusion extended to the use of the Catalan language itself being imposed on them in a process of "reverse discrimination" against Spanish (García et al 2006). Some participants were unpleasantly surprised by Catalan language being used in everyday situations, such as the doctor's office and neighborhood community meetings, even when participants thought it would be more logical to communicate in Spanish given its relative commonality and convenience. As NOVAK, who already spoke multiple languages fluently, including Spanish, and was starting to learn Catalan, said this sociolinguistic positioning got to the heart of the divide between migrants like him and non-migrants:

> *"I'm sure that you know Spanish but you do not want to speak Spanish. And that's your private issue. Because I'm not here to heal your political issue for territorial matters. I am speaking to you, so can you respect me? You are in a better position than I because you're in your country, and I'm not in my country. So I can't respond you in that way."*

Some participants who were fluent and/or native in Spanish also found it strange that some Barcelona lifers would prefer switching to English instead of speaking Spanish and distinguish themselves through the use of the Catalan language and identity when they could. JOHANNA, who had learned Spanish in Latin America and was forced to learn Catalan when she transferred to a Barcelona university, said *"I'd never felt that Catalan was used as a language for communication rather than a language for differentiation from Spanish, and I do not like it that."* This distinction was one that participants interpreted as hierarchical, with Barcelona lifers typically in the (1) category ascribing more value to Catalan to compensate for Spanish language speakers outnumbering Catalan ones, globally as well as locally given Catalonia's complicated ethnic, linguistic and political history with the rest of Spain.

Participants were thus caught in the middle of the dilemma of wanting to learn Spanish because it was useful with others in Barcelona as well as around the world and feeling like Catalan reigned supreme among public services and the city's most influential circles. However, whereas some interpreted this superiority complex as more of an ethnic identity than a linguistic one (Codó 2018), others interpreted it as the opposite. For example, when NOVAK, who had learned Spanish and was starting to learn Catalan, was asked what he thought about the Barcelona-born chef Miquel Coulibaly, whose mother is from Jaen (Spain) and father from Senegal, having recently won a recent episode of a Catalan cooking game show, NOVAK said *"He would have been respected probably because he was born here and then when that black person starts to speak Catalan it will be looked on with the other eyes for sure. Look up to be more accepted and respected in our society."* Yet as MARTINA saw it, *"The well-paid, executive, higher level jobs are not really available to foreigners. They are kept for the local people. Because the actual dynamic is quite local. It is not about do you speak Catalan or you don't. It is about are you from here, or what kind of money you have, which is not which is not specific only to Catalans. Small societies are like that. That's how they behave."* Regardless of its treatment as a language or an ethnicity, participants perceived Catalan as an identity that many Barcelona lifers sought to preserve.

Some participants ascribed Catalans' keep-to-themselves and often xenophobic attitude as related to a perception that most non-migrants had not lived abroad, spoken much English nor come into contact with foreigners (Lundström 2019), at least relative to participants' own experiences abroad and at least not until in recent years. TOMÁS echoed MARTINA's perceptions of small societies and elaborated on them, highlighting the divide between migrants and non-migrants and ways of patching up the social fragmentation:

> *"I think there is like a contradiction in the city. On one hand, you have a very big effort on, I don't know who, really, the city, the mayor, whatever but political effort from the Olympics of 92 until today to make Barcelona attractive for tourists and attractive for international people to come… And on the other hand, I feel like local people, some of them, feel that they never really voted for that or they just got pushed into that situation. And so I feel like In some places, they don't see themselves as people from a big city or from a metropolitan city. They still see themselves as people from a small neighborhood, from very local places, people who know their neighbors from always. I feel like it's broken down into in that sense the city. They only meet you when they see that you're trying to be part of Barcelona or part of the city."*

*Adina: "How would you show them that you want to be a part of the city?"*

*TOMÁS: "Well, you can start trying to learn Catalan, or you can start joining these neighborhood things. I used to go, for example, to a place where they join to fix bikes every Tuesday, and they were all Catalonians. And they show you for free how to fix a bike that you got from the street. And they were very open and welcoming when they saw that you were going there at least a couple of times."*

The importance of the city's positioning, as well as individual positioning, was a consideration that many participants brought up as faulty given the divide with locals. As Belabas 2023 noted, an unsatisfying mismatch between expectations and realities for both migrants and migrants can ultimately affect a city's capacity for talent arbitrage. Participants ultimately perceived language acquisition (English, Spanish, Catalan) based on what it could afford them based on their own positioning and needs within Barcelona, a perspective that differed based on a participants' relative positioning among underlying global class relationships.

### 4.4.2 Attempting to dissolve the divides

While not meant to be reflective of this migrant population at large, roughly one third of participants had learned to speak Catalan (some but not all fluently), another third were able to understand it (given its similarity to other romance languages; Adsera & Pytlikova 2015) and speak some Catalan, whereas the other knew little to no Catalan. In some cases, it was precisely the smallness of Catalan that generated perceptions of intimacy, hospitality and belonging among many of the participants who learned Catalan to varying degrees. This was in contrast to those who did not learn Catalan, regardless of how long they had been in Barcelona. For example, YAEL's native language was also a minority language and she felt a shared kinship with Catalan:

*"When people speak [my native language] to me, there's something warm about this, you know. So I think that if someone speaks your language, the language from your home, you just feel more like a friend or family… I'm already getting better at Castellano, eventually Catalan just because I think that it opens another window. To have a chit-chat with someone, I think that it makes a big difference; it makes a person talk to you in a completely different way."*

Consideration must be given to the relative backgrounds of the participants, as mentioned in previous sections, for comparisons among participants to take on more meaning. For example, ROSY, who spoke French while growing up in Sub-Saharan Africa and learned Catalan upon moving to Barcelona, said: *"We make mistake of waiting for local to come to us, You know, it's for us to go to them,"* a mindset she said she learned from having studied abroad earlier in a German-speaking European country. Yet not all participants viewed not making an effort to learn Catalan and go up to Catalans as a "mistake"; not learning Catalan was their "resistance weapon" (Codó 2018), proof that they did not "need it" or had not given into the pressures of the narrow-minded provincialism that some participants felt they were trying to escape by aligning themselves with the "cosmopolitan" character of English.

Take the following examples from bakeries from IVANKA, who had lived in Barcelona for a year and was originally Eastern European country but had learned English while living in an Anglosphere country

where she eventually obtained citizenship, and YOSELIN, who had spent her whole life on an island in the Caribbean and for whom she Barcelona felt like the *"real world"* when she had moved there less than a year prior:

> IVANKA: "*The lady, you can see that she wasn't happy when I was trying to explain what I want to order like a pastry. And I was trying to say it in Spanish to pronounce it … now I don't feel confident going there because she wasn't very welcome. She looked at me, she was so serious, almost made me feel like it's my fault that I don't speak [Catalan]… unpatient [sic] you know, like with me, and there wasn't a queue."*

> YOSELIN: *"[My dog gets] a very special relationship with the* panadera *(baker) from the corner. They are Catalans. All of them, it's like a family group because they are two alike, one from each other, they're always asking,* bon dia! Com va tot? Jo vull dues torrats integrats si us plau. *(In Catalan:* Hello! How's it going? I'd like two wheat toasts, please.) *And she says to her friends, 'she comes here to buy the bread and practice Catalan with me because I talk to her a few words.' It's very nice. La señora Rosa."*

Not only did YOSELIN appreciate Catalan at a street level but at a professional level as well, aligning herself with some of the same Catalan professional networks that MARTINA, who worked mostly in English and was able to understand some Catalan but resisted learning more, had felt excluded from. ROSY also noticed this divide and embraced Catalan so that she could follow the *"path of local entrepreneur"* and take advantage of elite opportunities not open to all internationals, such as networking, mentoring and funding, making ROSY one of the top earners in the group of participants.

> ROSY: *"When I speak Catalan, even I speak badly, it opens 70% of opportunities I would say — even 80, to be honest. I've seen some people who bought my service because I'm trying to speak. 'I like because you came in our country and we have an interest in the local culture. I want to know, where is your business? What your level? What do you need to have? How?' I didn't know that Catalan was one of the advantages."*

Beyond economic capital and social networking capital, the "coveted linguistic capital" (Codó 2018) of Catalan language comprehension improved some participants' perceived status within the city by feeling in-the-know relative to other internationals, similar to migrants who learned the language of the destination country (Hayes 2018 and others). PAOLO, who learned Catalan before Spanish and was one of the few participants considering acquiring Spanish nationality, said that even though he did not care if other migrants learned Catalan or not, knowing Catalan gave him an edge over his foreign friends who he said had a more *"superficial"* understanding of the city than he did. CHARLOTTE found that understanding Catalan helped her be a part of a local lace-making club surrounded by mostly Catalan older ladies, which made her feel more a part of the social fabric of the city. While JOHANNA felt like Catalan was unnecessarily imposed on her when she transferred to a Barcelona university, her knowledge of both Spanish and Catalan was critical to her involvement in myriad groups around the city.

In short, participants' acceptance or rejection of Catalan language was often legitimized by individuals (Codó 2018) seeking to navigate their relative social standing, as not all felt like it would be a worthwhile

investment given their relative backgrounds, even though the participants who did learn Catalan achieved better prospects, social as well as financial. Given that upward social mobility is determined by one's relative positioning in terms of class and their interpretation of social capital, socioeconomic and sociolinguistic factors play significant roles in shaping personal and language trajectories in Barcelona, as individuals strive to improve their position within the city.

# 5. Conclusions and discussion

In conclusion, this study highlights the complex nature of transnational migration to Barcelona, emphasizing the significance of various factors in understanding university-educated migrants' experiences. Whereas previous studies on migration to Barcelona tend to divide migrants into high and low skills based on their educational profile (López-Gay 2014; Cocola-Gant & López-Gay 2020; López-Gay 2023), with the term "talent" being ascribed mostly to the former instead of the latter (Lopez-Gay 2016), this paper argues that it is instead relative socioeconomic class on the global scale, pulling from concepts of lifestyle migration research (Benson, O'Reilly, Hayes, McGarrigle and others), is a key to shaping migrants' experiences. These factors influence privileges and opportunities within the city, where efforts to step out of comfort zones and navigate social hierarchies must be viewed as relative between the hosting community and the sending communities from around the world.

Furthermore, the paper extends the idea of Barcelona's foreign-only spatial enclaves (Cocola-Gant & López Gay 2020) that exacerbate the increasingly fragmented and gentrified city (Parreño-Castellano et al 2022) to include sociolinguistic "bubbles" (Zaban 2015). In doing so, it calls into question idea of nationalistic communities of migrants and English-only circles (O'Reilly, Lundström 2018 and others), arguing that this paints an incomplete picture of the complex dynamics at play for migrants, particularly in a bilingual city like Barcelona, where English complicates existing tensions between the Spanish and Catalan (García et al 2006, Codó 2018). Language proficiency, both acquired in a classroom or at home, plays a crucial role in transnational migration (Adsera & Pytlikova 2015; Arvidsson & Jemstedt 2022), impacting social integration and professional prospects, giving the perception of exclusive status to native speakers of English as well as Catalan, which means those who have learned the local language(s) may have different experiences and levels of acceptance. This paper also suggests negotiation of learned languages and cultural fluency also affects the ability to engage in geoarbitrage (Hayes 2018), in addition to socioeconomic status and economic resources.

Together, these factors can either support the creation of a successful melting pot or perpetuate social divisions within the fragmented city, both among migrants as well as non-migrants in the case of Barcelona, as visualized in Fig 2 based participants' responses. It is crucial to acknowledge that positions within this chart are specific to Barcelona and are not fixed but rather shaped by individual positioning; people strategically align their identity in Barcelona within this context to improve their social status, a phenomenon influenced by habitus (Bourdieu 1984). The study reveals that these social and cultural tensions are interconnected with economic inequality and residential segregation, which undermine the city's ability to fully harness the potential of its residents and can weaken the city's social fabric.

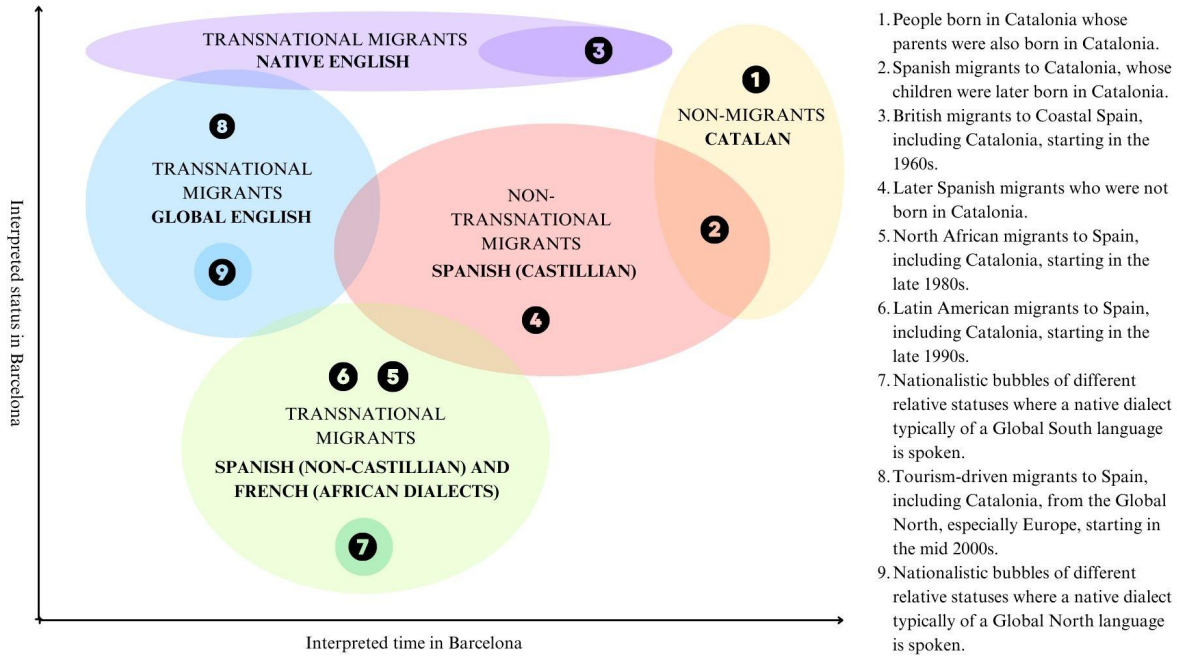


Fig 2: Class and language-based fragmentation of Barcelona from the perspectives of university-educated migrants. Source: Elaborated by the author

In light of the rapid rise in transnational migration that began 40 years ago and continues to this day (López-Gay 2014) as well as tourism (Aymerich 2021, Jover & Díaz-Parra 2022), it would behoove city officials and residents to make tolerance a top priority in order for foreigners to flourish within the city's local ecosystem. To be effective, however, this understanding of tolerance should be understood as a give-and-take according to the relative positioning of a given migrant and a given member of the receiving community. In other words, for the city to act as a true melting pot, both migrants and non-migrants must feel like they can "stir the pot" together. On the one hand, migrants must recognize the many facets of their relative privilege compared to receiving communities and be open to their ways of doing things. As NOVAK said: *"I need to adjust my way of living since I'm not from here. I just cannot...* imponer *[impose] that to people,"* using his learned Spanish to make his argument, no less. On the other hand, receiving communities must also recognize their relative privilege across the wide spectrum of migrants that arrive in their city and be open to including them. Some of these efforts are already in place, for example where TOMÁS played volleyball with migrants and non-migrants: *"Catalonians can be like 'I'm the local, let me show you the city, we'll organize some stuff."* Or on a more general level how it gives ROSY hope that *"the teenagers who are coming up, they behave differently. They're not very conservative to the [Catalan] culture. Like 'I'll only be friends with my cousin' but now they are like, a little bit open up."*

While it is unlikely that the dominance of English and Spanish language will be dismantled in Barcelona, what can also be done to level the field throughout are initiatives to make Catalan more welcoming and accessible for migrants, as well as make English and experiences abroad in other languages including English, more accessible to all born-and-raised Barcelonians. Furthermore, while Catalan-Spanish bilingualism in Barcelona may be a unique case within Spain (García et al, Codó 2018), opportunities for

tolerance can be applied to other cities, both in the South and North, especially where minority languages like Catalan compete with majority ones like Spanish and English. Moreover, it is imperative for city branding initiatives to embrace the complexities of contemporary urban dynamics, particularly in light of the expanding and diverse population shaped by enhanced socioeconomic mobility (Belabas 2023). By recognizing and incorporating these multifaceted factors, cities have a more promising chance at navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by an evolving social landscape and fostering a more inclusive and successful future for its residents.

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## CRediT authorship contribution statement

As there was only 1 author, she was in charge of all steps in the research process, from conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, software, validation, data curation, resources, writing – original, writing, review and editing. Some colleagues were asked to give feedback on the paper for former versions of the manuscript, which was also very helpful.

## Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT to generate synonyms, summarize sentences and paragraphs, provide alternate ways of expressing the author's original writing and translate relevant parts of participant interviews from Spanish into English. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and she takes full responsibility for the content of the publication in this regard.

## Declaration of competing interest

The author worked with the magazine Barcelona Metropolitan from August 2018-February 2019, has been an unpaid speaker at Barcelona International Community Day and is a member of Barcelona Global, however, these relationships bear no influence on the results reported in this paper.

# APPENDIX

| Code name | Gender | Age | Origin | EU | Partner | Time in Barcelona (years, estimated) | Income (thousands of euros) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| JEAN LUC | Male | 26 | Western Europe | Yes | No | 2 | 30-45 |
| YAEL | Female | 34 | Western Asia | Yes** | Yes | 1 | 15-30 |
| TOMÁS | Male | 33 | South America | Yes** | Yes | 3 | 45+ |
| BRIAN | Male | 55 | Northern Europe | Yes | Yes | 20+ | 0-15 |
| HASSAN | Male | 45 | North Africa | No | Yes | 4 | 0*** |
| ILSE | Female | 46 | Western Europe | Yes | No | 8 | 15-30 |
| PAOLO | Male | 37 | Southern Europe | Yes | No | 9 | 30-45 |
| MARTINA | Female | 39 | Eastern Europe | Yes | Yes | 6 | 30-45 |
| IVANKA | Female | 34 | Eastern Europe | Yes | Yes | 1 | 30-45 |
| JOHANNA | Female | 42 | Western Europe | Yes | No | 19 | 15-30 |
| CHARLOTTE | Female | 62 | Northern Europe | Yes* | Yes | 20+ | 15-30 |
| NOVAK | Male | 41 | Southern Europe | Yes** | Yes | 4 | 45+ |
| DAVID | Male | 31 | Central America | No | Yes | 3 | 30-45 |
| ROSY | Female | 35 | Sub-Saharan Africa | No | No | 5 | 45+ |
| YOSELIN | Female | 49 | Caribbean | No | Yes | 1 | 0*** |

Fig 1. Matrix of semi-structured interview participants. * denotes pre-Brexit residency. ** denotes acquired later in life for increased mobility. *** denotesunemployed and/or starting a business.

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