

## Tourism-related mobilities and discursive landscaping in the Algarve

### Mobilidades relacionadas com o turismo e a paisagem discursiva do Algarve

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#### Abstract

Besides receiving large numbers of tourists, the Algarve is also becoming home to growing communities of migrants whose first language is not Portuguese. Besides the so-called “economic migrants” who have arrived from eastern European countries, attracted by the employment opportunities in construction and the service sectors that have resulted from the development of mass tourism, there are also growing numbers of northern European “lifestyle migrants” in search of a better way of life in the sun. The transformations in the ethnoscape of the region due to these tourism-related mobilities have impacted on its semiotic landscape. Notably, English is seemingly everywhere, whilst the languages of the eastern European migrant communities are almost entirely absent. In this paper, I explore how some of the texts that appear in the semiotic landscape can be viewed as nexus points for various circulating discursive practices. Such practices are spatially and temporally embedded in a dialectical relationship with the politics of place and, ultimately, contribute to the discursive construction of the inclusion/exclusion of different social groups.

**Keywords:** tourism; mobilities; migration; semiotic landscape; discursive practices; Algarve.

#### Resumo

Para além do grande número de turistas que recebe, o Algarve é também o destino de eleição de comunidades crescentes de migrantes cuja língua materna não é o Português. Por um lado, há os chamados “migrantes económicos” de países da Europa de leste, atraídos pelas oportunidades de emprego na construção civil e no setor de serviços resultantes do desenvolvimento do turismo de massas. Por outro, há um número crescente de “lifestyle migrants” da Europa do norte, em busca de um estilo de vida melhor. Estas transformações na paisagem etnográfica da região também tiveram impacto na paisagem semiótica. De salientar que a língua inglesa surge por todo lado, enquanto as línguas das comunidades de migrantes da Europa de leste estão quase ausentes. Neste artigo, analisa-se a forma como alguns dos textos visíveis na paisagem semiótica podem ser vistos como “pontos de nexos” de diversas práticas discursivas em circulação. Tais práticas estão espacial e temporalmente incorporadas numa relação dialética com as políticas de lugar e contribuem para a construção discursiva da inclusão/exclusão de grupos sociais distintos.

**Palavras-chave:** turismo; mobilidades; migração; paisagem semiótica; práticas discursivas; Algarve.

## 1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, tourism-related mobilities have led to vast changes in the landscape of the Algarve region. It is often remarked upon that the physical landscape (both in its natural and built aspects) has changed almost beyond recognition in many parts of the region due to mass tourism. However, the changes in the semiotic aspects of the landscape that have accompanied these physical changes are not always so obvious. For Jaworski and Thurlow (2010: 2), semiotic landscapes may be defined as “any (public) space with visible inscription made through deliberate human intervention and meaning-making”. The study of semiotic landscapes is a relatively recent line of research, and is concerned with the ways in which various discursive practices interact, for example through language, images, or even architecture, in particular spaces. By including other discursive modalities, therefore, the concept of semiotic landscape goes beyond the notion of *linguistic landscape*, which comprises “visually situated *language* in public spaces” (Hult, 2009: 90 – my emphasis). Although tourism is undeniably a “supremely semiotic industry” (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2010: 188), to date there has been scant detailed research on the relationships between tourism and language in the landscape, and even less into how the semiotic landscape is being shaped through discursive practices that emanate from different forms of tourism-related mobilities, which include various migrant as well as tourist flows.

In this study, I follow Blommaert (2014) and Blommaert and Maly (2014) in taking an ethnographic approach in order to shed some light on how the presence (and absence) of languages and other semiotic aspects in the landscape might be linked to the patterns of social interaction among different communities of people within particular spaces. By exploring how various discursive features in the landscape of the Algarve can be viewed as localized instances of globalized discursive practices, this paper explores how such practices contribute to the discursive construction of the inclusion/exclusion of different social groups that inhabit or use the place. Besides reflecting on how tourist practices have shaped the semiotic landscape of a popular tourist resort (Vilamoura) in the central Algarve, I also examine in detail the cases of

two examples of highly visible signs which can be seen as nexus points for different types of tourism-related discourses and mobilities.

The methodological approach taken, therefore, does not seek to “catalogue” the landscape, as more quantitatively-driven studies of the linguistic landscape have done. Nor does the scope of this paper allow for any detailed or exhaustive exploration of the various types of signs and other instances of written texts that may make up a landscape. What this paper rather hopes to achieve is a reflection on how qualitative analysis of particular aspects of a semiotic landscape can reveal how signs in public spaces can be “indices of social relationships, interests and practices, deployed in a field which is replete with overlapping and intersecting norms – not just norms of language use, but norms of conduct, membership, legitimate belonging and usage” (Blommaert and Maly, 2014: 4). In the following sections, I will provide some further theoretical and methodological considerations in support of a more discursive approach to landscape studies.

## **2. Semiotic landscapes and inclusion/exclusion**

The underlying assumption of this research conforms to the perspective currently emphasized across the social sciences that the notion of “landscape” corresponds to a particular “way of seeing”; it is a “contrived scene” that is (re)produced primarily by power relations enacted through cultural, political and social practices (Trudeau, 2006). As such, landscapes do not simply “exist” as backdrops to social life; rather, they are constructed through an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining material and discursive boundaries that correspond to “imagined geographies” (Trudeau, 2006: 422). Within landscapes, particular sets of values and aesthetics and particular patterns of social practices, behaviour and activities can become normalized (or, on the other hand, marginalised or even excluded). Furthermore, since spatialised social identities and modes of belonging in place are also strongly connected to the construction of landscapes, landscapes are also constitutive of social relations and the relative social standing of individuals and social groups (Duncan and Duncan, 2001).

The growing body of empirical research on linguistic landscapes (LLs) around the world (see, for example, Gorter, 2006; Shohamy and Gorter, 2009) has provided a

window on how language practices contribute to the “visual ideology” (Cosgrove, 1985) that shapes its overall landscape. For example, the simple presence or absence of different languages in a landscape may transmit “symbolic messages about the importance, power, significance and relevance of certain languages or the irrelevance of others” (Shohamy, 2006: 110). Following such a line of enquiry inevitably leads to issues of social group identity, since languages are intricately tied to collective identities (Ben-Rafael, 2009). At the same time, social identities are not easily separable from place-making practices, since places are not only constructed *by* people, but are also constitutive *of* people: *who* we are is inevitably linked to *where* we are (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 210). For the purposes of my research, I consider that this dialectical relationship can be encapsulated in the concept of “place-identity”, which I specifically take to mean the relationship between the *discursive* construction of place and the *discursive* construction of the multiplicities of the individual and collective self.<sup>1</sup>

Semiotic landscapes are privileged sites for studying the *in situ* construction of place-identity, since the texts, images and other discursive modalities we find in them are at once “social semiotic resources” (van Leeuwen, 2005) for meaning-making and also, crucially, material elements of a place. Studies of the linguistic landscape (LL) have therefore proved to be a fruitful means of exploring how social identities can be strongly related to both language policies and practices in places at various scales (i.e. local, regional, national, global). What such studies can reveal, for example, is how the highly visible presence of a particular language or language variety within a landscape strongly indexes the social inclusion of the in-group(s) that identify - or are identified - with that language. In the case of tourist destinations, for example, it is common to find that the language(s) of the major tourist markets, and/or English (as the *lingua franca* of international tourism) are extremely visible in the landscape, thus not only providing a means of communication but also transmitting a message of welcome and acceptance of tourists.

Likewise, language *exclusion* in the landscape may also relate to some form of social exclusion and may even indicate an underlying social struggle – although this aspect may be more difficult to tease out. Where linguistic exclusion and situations of

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<sup>1</sup> See Torkington (2011) for a more detailed discussion of this conceptualisation of place-identity.

linguistic conflict have been mentioned in LL studies, it has usually been in the context of “official” language policies and the exercise of language politics that can be traced in particular territories. Sebba (2010: 63), for example, explains how in South Africa the politically dominant white population “erased from public texts all but their own native languages” (English and Afrikaans), meaning that the South African LL became an ideological project that far from reflects the true linguistic diversity found within the territory.<sup>2</sup> However, in other places the practices of language exclusion and the precise reasons for and consequences of this are much harder to pinpoint, when they are not related to clear-cut political processes. Furthermore, the notion of “exclusion” has connotations of deliberate social action, although sometimes there is no evidence of an obvious intention to “exclude” a language from a landscape: the process of landscaping, after all, is complex and involves diverse social actors. It is not simply the result of top-down language policy execution. There might be reasons for individual sign-producers to “exclude” languages that might be expected (socially or geographically) since the choice of language might be determined by market forces, for example, or simply the intended receiver(s) of the message.

In a country like Portugal, officially (and, seemingly, consensually) a monolingual nation<sup>3</sup>, with no apparent need for explicit, state-imposed, language policies, one would not expect much in the way of linguistic conflict, in the landscape or indeed in any other socio-political arena. Since there is only one official language, and no other competing languages or language varieties within the nation-state, one may assume that national identity is closely related to a single, unified national language and therefore not only would one expect that language to dominate in the LL, but since the social group who speak that language apparently includes the entire population, its use is socially inclusive. Indeed, it may not make sense to speak of “language exclusion” in the LL of a supposedly monolingual country, since theoretically there may not be any reason to include *any* other language in public spaces: thus, *all* other languages are equally excluded.

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<sup>2</sup> See also, for example, Backhaus (2009) for the case of Quebec; Lanza and Woldemariam (2009) for the case of Ethiopia.

<sup>3</sup>The Portuguese State Constitution refers to Portuguese as the official language, although in a subsequent revision Portuguese Sign Language is also recognised. In the district of Miranda do Douro, *Mirandês* is also recognised as an official language, although its speakers are said to number less than 5,000.

This is clearly not a reflection of reality, however. Moreover, such an argument reflects a static, territorialized view of the landscape, by assuming that language use is tied to the geographical boundaries of nations (and/or regions) as well as to well-established traditions and linguistic history. Yet many contemporary places and their landscapes are also shaped by mobilities, including the global mega-phenomena of tourism and migration. It is therefore pertinent to consider how languages are being included and (apparently) excluded from the linguistic landscaping of places that are strongly characterised by shifting, mobile “ethnoscapes” (Appadurai, 1996). As Kallen (2009: 272) has pointed out, the model of the LL that takes account of tourism “must incorporate transience and diversity as an essential part of the social environment”.

### **3. A discursive approach to the landscape**

Although the majority of the work to date on the LL has arisen from the fields of sociolinguistics and multilingualism, there have been some moves towards a more discursive approach. This has emanated mainly from the work of Scollon and Wong Scollon, who introduced a novel way of examining interactions among the “in-place” meanings of signs and discourses and the meanings of our actions in and among these discourses in place (Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2003: 2) - a social phenomenon they called “geosemiotics”.

This work was further developed in their framework for *nexus analysis* (Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2004), where they argue that an individual action, such as producing a sign to position in a certain way in the physical environment, is a mediated social action. The action is generally mediated in two dimensions: the physical and the symbolic. The physical mediation refers to the means of production of the sign, which could be hand-written (e.g. a lunch menu chalked on a board outside a restaurant), painted on a wall (graffiti, for example), type-written or type-set and printed (a flyer, or a notice stuck in a window, for instance), and so on. The symbolic form of mediation refers to the beliefs and values attached to the action, which could be linked to individual and cultural tastes, social identities, language ideologies, and so forth. Since these sorts of beliefs and values are circulated in and through discourse, and since there is always a multitude of discourses in circulation, a social action such as

producing a sign can therefore be seen as a nexus point where multiple discourses may meet and interact. Crucial to their argument is the way in which even the most mundane of social actions is a nexus through which the largest cycles of socio-cultural and political organization and activity flow and circulate (Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2004: 7).

Thus, nexus analysis is a useful tool to explore the linguistic landscape, as a way of bringing traditions of ethnographic, sociolinguistic and discourse analysis together to focus on “how discourses are socially contextualized across space and time, on how discourses operate moment by moment in social interaction, and on how socio-political factors shape and are shaped by language use” (Hult, 2009: 92). Central to this approach is the concept of discourse as not merely language-in-use, but rather as language-in-action (Blommaert, 2005; Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2004) or language-as-practice (van Leeuwen, 2008). Also fundamental is a sensitivity to the way that the circulating discourses which meet up at the nexus points we choose to analyse are not only geographically emplaced but also embedded in historicity. Of course this does not mean that they are “fixed” in time and space: to consider the semiotic landscape as being comprised of a set of discursive practices means remaining open to its dynamic, processual, shifting nature.

In his study of tourism and representation in the Irish linguistic landscape, Kallen (2009) considers that the linguistic landscape as a whole should be taken as a form of discourse, with each sign within it being “a localized act of communication” with its own producer(s), receiver(s), addresser(s) and intended addressee(s). This suggests that the LL cannot therefore be circumscribed into one bounded, observable unit; at best we can explore what particular, localised acts of communication might reveal about the ongoing process of linguistic landscaping in the surrounding space.

A discursive approach to the landscape has a further advantage. By understanding discourse as a form of social practice (e.g. Fairclough, 2001; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; van Leeuwen, 2009; Wodak and Meyer, 2009), we can then examine how one particular form of discursive practice (such as producing, distributing and receiving the message(s) inscribed on a sign) articulates with other forms of social practices which also contribute to the landscape in other ways: through the material organization of space, through architecture and building practices; through the incorporation or

adaptation of natural physical features, as well as the encouragement (or prohibition) of activities in certain localities. Therefore, because there is always some kind of dialectical relationship between any discursive event and the social and material world in which it is emplaced, we can say that discourse (re)produces and shapes social situations, objects of knowledge, social identities and social relations as well as being (re)produced and shaped by them (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258).

#### **4. Tourism-related mobilities in the Algarve**

Until fairly recently, the Algarve was all but cut off from the rest of Portugal both geographically and politically. Physically, the region is bordered to the south and the west by the Atlantic, to the east by the Guadiana river (that separates it physically from Andalucía in Spain) and to the north by a range of small mountains, which give way to the seemingly endless plains of the Alentejo region. For several hundred years, the region was a separate province, ruled by the north African Moors until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when it was known as Al-Gharb (the West) and then, after the Christian reconquest, as the Kingdom of the Algarve. The subsequent Portuguese monarchs called themselves King of Portugal and the Algarves until the declaration of the Republic in 1910. During the 50-year dictatorship of the *Estado Novo* (1926-1974), the Algarve was a remote land of market towns, declining ports, fishing villages and small-holdings, with barely any connection to the rest of the world.

Tourism development began in the late 1960s, after the inauguration of Faro airport and the subsequent construction of new hotels along the coast and the first golf courses. Tourism nights in Algarve hotels increased from a mere 232 in 1950 to over one million by 1970 (Silva and da Silva, 1991). Following the Portuguese democratic revolution in 1974, tourism in the Algarve grew at an exponential rate. Construction began in earnest along the coastal belt of the Algarve, transforming small fishing villages into sprawling resort towns. The resulting “development” was intense but somewhat chaotic. By the early twenty-first century, the region received over 40% of the total of overnight stays in Portugal and tourism-related jobs accounted for around 60% of the regional employment market (WTTC, 2003). The regional economy



has, over the past decade, remained heavily dependent on tourism, in particular international tourism from northern European countries, especially the UK.<sup>4</sup>

However, tourism-related mobilities are not restricted to tourist flows. In parallel with the development of the tourism industry in the Algarve, there has been a rapid increase in inward migration to the region, the majority of which can be directly related to the development of tourism. Throughout the twentieth century, until the 1960s, migratory flows were characterised by outward migration, with large numbers of Algarvians emigrating as far afield as North and South America and South Africa, as well as to northern European countries (notably France, Switzerland, Luxemburg and Germany). However, after the 1974 Revolution and the independence of the former Portuguese colonies in Africa, incoming migratory flows began, originating initially from the so-called PALOP<sup>5</sup> countries and joined in the 1990s by Brazilians and, importantly, eastern Europeans, attracted by the employment possibilities in the burgeoning construction industry and the service sector due to the ever-growing tourism industry. Therefore, although these so-called “labour” or “economic” migrants usually take a back-stage position as far as tourism is concerned, in this region employment-related migration can be said to be a form of tourism-related mobility.

At the same time, there has been a steadily increasing in-flow of so-called “lifestyle migrants” (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009) from northern European countries. The lifestyle migration phenomenon in Europe is clearly a tourism-related form of contemporary mobility. The favoured destinations are typically areas in southern Europe that are already associated with and developed for tourism and leisure, and which (besides the promise of sunshine and a better climate) are perceived as affording the more relaxed and sociable lifestyle that northern Europeans often associate with southern European cultures. In short, such migrants are relatively affluent people who have made conscious lifestyle choices, including the decision as to where to live. Whilst the lifestyle orientations of these migrants may differ, perhaps the one unifying factor of this broadly defined social group is their belief that a change of residential place will lead to a better and more fulfilling way of life (Torkington,

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<sup>4</sup> Almost 2.6 million international passenger arrivals were recorded at Faro Airport in 2007, half of which originated in the UK (INE, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> *Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa* (African Countries with Portuguese as Official Language): Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, and São Tomé e Príncipe.

2010). The Algarve is certainly the most popular region of Portugal for northern European migrants (including full-time settlers, those who spend part of the year in Portugal and frequent-visitor second-home owners). The largest national group by far is the British with significant numbers also hailing from Germany, Holland and Ireland, as well as Scandinavian countries.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that over the past decade there has been a sharp rise in the number of Chinese taking up residence in the Algarve, with 1,311 registered in 2010. The Chinese who live in the Algarve are generally involved in family-run businesses, particularly restaurants and shops, many of which are located in tourist resorts. Recently, many Chinese migrants (along with others such as Russian and South African nationals) have taken advantage of the so-called “Golden Visa” incentive programme. This allows non-EU nationals who pursue investment activities, transferring large amounts of capital, creating jobs or acquiring real estate in Portugal (over the value of 500,000 euros), to apply for a Residence Permit, which subsequently gives them the right to family regrouping, and possible access to permanent residence and Portuguese citizenship.<sup>6</sup>

In sum, the rapid and profound socio-demographic changes that have taken place in the Algarve as a consequence of tourism development mean that the Algarve is becoming an increasingly multicultural and multilingual place. The potential impact on the Algarve region in terms of increasing multilingualism due to migrant groups can be seen in the fact that the combined number of legally registered foreign nationals from non-Portuguese speaking countries in 2010 was almost 48,000. This accounts for around 12% of the total regional population, but undoubtedly the real figures are higher since many EU migrants (particularly northern Europeans who may not live year-round in the Algarve) do not register themselves as residents.

Indeed, the Algarve is the only region in Portugal where the number of migrants from non-Portuguese speaking countries is higher than the number from Portuguese-speaking countries. When added to the fact that the Algarve is the region with the largest number of international tourist arrivals, we can see that the potential impact

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<sup>6</sup> Further information on the *Golden Visa* programme available at <http://www.sef.pt> [accessed 23.06.2014].

on language choice in the landscape is therefore higher than in any other region (Table 1).

**Table 1: Largest groups of foreign nationals (from non-Portuguese speaking countries) legally registered in the Algarve, 2010 (Source: SEF)**

<b>Country of origin</b>	
<b>UK</b>	<b>11,129</b>
<b>Ukraine</b>	<b>9,676</b>
<b>Romania</b>	<b>8,587</b>
<b>Moldavia</b>	<b>4,704</b>
<b>Germany</b>	<b>3,526</b>
<b>Holland</b>	<b>2,176</b>
<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>2,087</b>
<b>China</b>	<b>1,311</b>

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## **5. The influence of tourism in shaping the linguistic landscape**

A visit to any of the coastal resort towns in the Algarve will leave no-one in any doubt that English is seemingly “everywhere” nowadays in this region. Besides hearing English spoken in public spaces, written English is also highly visible on the local signage. However, the discursive functions that English performs within the “semiotic aggregate” (Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2003) of the linguistic landscape, where signs are produced by a variety of social actors for a variety of reasons, are overwhelmingly within what Kallen (2010) would call the “marketplace” and “portal” discourse frames; that is, English is being used either for commercial practices associated with tourism (the buying and selling of goods and services), or for practices associated with movement (of people, goods, information, money, and so on).

Strolling around the marina area of one of the most popular tourist resorts in the central Algarve - Vilamoura - one is bombarded with texts in English, vying for attention to announce restaurant and café daily “specials”, “full English” breakfasts, “big game” fishing trips, champagne cruises, “Sky Sports fixtures” on plasma screen TVs, discounts in shops, currency exchange, the marina facilities, and so on. What is also immediately noticeable is that other languages are absent in this landscape. Even Portuguese seems barely to be present, although it is used within the “civic frame” (Kallen, 2010) – or, as Scollon and Wong Scollon (2003) designate it, for “official regulatory” and “infrastructural” functions. In both commercial and informational contexts, however, it seems to play second fiddle to English. Elsewhere, I have discussed how the majority of the signage in the Algarve that is bilingual employs strategies to make the English text salient (e.g. by placing the English on top, or to the left, of the Portuguese, using a larger font and brighter colours) and thus the semiotics of the landscape give a clear message about the relative status of both the language itself and those who speak it (Torkington, 2013).

Moreover, in the discursive frame of the marketplace, there are examples of the commodification of the Portuguese language, in conjunction with other “authentic” local markers such as the Portuguese flag, to sell tourist souvenirs that at least give a fleeting impression of being emplaced on one’s holidays rather than being in the midst of an impersonal, global setting that could in fact be in any one of a number of international tourist destinations. Figure 1 neatly captures this: within a snapshot of a semiotic landscape dominated by signage in English, a tourist is taking her own snapshot of a store front dedicated to Portuguese football souvenirs, with the logo “Força Portugal®” across the front.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst other languages (which, according to the nationalities of visitors to Vilamoura might include German, Spanish, French, and Russian) are not obviously present in this landscape, meaning that English is framed as the dominant language of communication in this particular resort, it can also be noted that the tourist geography of the Algarve tends towards the formation of “enclaves” dominated by certain nationalities. Vilamoura is well-known as a tourist destination for the British market,

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<sup>7</sup> This is the widely used slogan used for mustering support for the national football team. Interestingly, here the phrase has been trademarked.

whilst in other areas of the Algarve, there are greater numbers of, say, German or Spanish speaking tourists. In such areas, those languages are more visible in the landscape.

**Figure 1: Snapshot of the semiotic landscape, Vilamoura Marina**



Of course none of this is surprising; local entrepreneurs who rely on the tourist trade are certainly aware of how few people (in Europe) speak Portuguese, even as a foreign language, and it is clear that in order to do business, a *lingua franca* is required. In this way, “tourist” languages – especially English – are given a front-of-stage position in tourist spaces and thus play a fundamental role in the “touristification” of the landscapes of many parts of the Algarve. As a symbolic marker, the widespread use of English helps to construct not only a tourist-friendly but also a cosmopolitan identity for the place (Torkington, 2009) as well as indexing more general cultural and economic values associated with globalization (Hult, 2009) and, consequently, serving as a marker of social inclusion on a wider, global scale.

Indeed, as well as appealing to tourists, the use of English also seems to be important for the place-identity of younger generations of Algarvians, who are keen to position themselves as global citizens and to cast off the pre-tourism image of the Algarve as an isolated, rural region. The use of English is certainly not restricted to the

status of *lingua franca* in the landscapes of the tourist spaces in the Algarve. English is increasingly visible in other contexts, where the intended audience appears to be “local” people rather than tourists. As in many other parts of the world, advertising campaigns for global brands make ample use of English, often “blended” with the local language, to stylize modern, elite identities. A blatant example of this was spotted on a roadside billboard in the residential outskirts of Vilamoura - an advertisement for a well-known (Swedish) make of car, with the slogan *Novo Volvo V40 – IT’S YOU!*<sup>8</sup> In this way, linguistic resources are being used to flag not only spatial mobilities, but seemingly also potential social mobility within a local place. Furthermore, mobility also has an inseparable temporal dimension. Sociolinguistic environments, including LLs, “follow and reflect the history of places” (Blommaert, 2010: 151), and thus what might at first glance seem like a chaotic aggregate of language practices in many contemporary places can often, on closer inspection, be understood as “sedimented layers” of discourse reflecting the presence of different social groups over time. In order to further illustrate and develop this line of thinking, I now turn to a more detailed analysis of two examples of signs found in the central Algarve.

## **6. Vilamoura: ‘National Quality of Life Reserve’**

Recently, I came across a huge roadside billboard on the outskirts of Vilamoura. The billboard was composed of an image of a young woman on a bicycle, her arms stretched upwards and her eyes closed in an ecstatic, dreamlike state, accompanied by the following text apparently etched into the clear blue sky above a glimpse of a verdant landscape: I WASN’T BORN HERE BUT IT’S WHERE I BELONG (Figure 2).

This billboard is striking for several reasons. Firstly, although (as described above) it is by no means unusual for texts in public spaces in the Algarve to be in English due to the enormous tourist presence, this is a clear departure from the plethora of LL texts which are clearly touting for tourist business. It doesn’t, at first glance, appear to be advertising any particular tourist product or service; not does it have an informational or regulatory function. Upon further inspection, I found the billboard to

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<sup>8</sup> Complete translation into English: “The New Volvo V40 – IT’S YOU!”

be part of a new advertising campaign for the place itself with a further text (top left) announcing: NATIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE RESERVE. VILAMOURA. Whilst this might not make immediate sense to an English-speaking “outsider”, it is doubtless intended as a playful reference to the Ria Formosa Natural Reserve<sup>9</sup> – a protected area of salt marshes, sandbanks and tidal lagoons which stretches eastwards along the Algarvian coastline for 60 kilometres. It is a unique landscape, and is a tourist attraction in its own right. Its status as a “Natural Reserve” dates from 1978 – about the same time as the development of Vilamoura began. In many ways this is ironic, since Vilamoura is the complete opposite of a “natural” reserve – it is a purpose-built resort town, constructed from scratch on a large area of previously undeveloped land, much of it agricultural.

**Figure 2: Roadside billboard in the outskirts of Vilamoura**



Often billed as one of the largest purpose-built resorts in Europe (currently covering around 20 km<sup>2</sup>), it comprises a marina, several golf courses, a range of four and five star hotels, as well as many thousands of apartments and villas. The resort

<sup>9</sup> Nowadays, the area is officially designated as a “Parque Natural” (Natural Park), but it is still often referred to as a “Natural Reserve”, since this was how it was first classified as protected land.

area is owned and managed by one company – presently called Lusort – who can therefore market and promote the resort as a single bounded place: in this case, a “National Quality of Life Reserve”. The main aim of this billboard, then, is place marketing, but it also appears to be an indirect form of real estate marketing.

In many ways, this billboard text encapsulates the discursive construction of place-identity among British lifestyle migrants to this part of the Algarve. One of the findings of my own research into this is the strong sense of feeling at home, or belonging in place, that British residents in the Algarve forge for themselves in talking about their migration experiences, despite the fact that they generally have little knowledge of the Portuguese language, culture, country or its affairs. Their mode of belonging is very much a contemporary form of “elective belonging”, based on the notion that a residential place is actively *chosen* for its apparent fit with one’s lifestyle requirements and as such, being “born and bred” in a place is not a pre-requisite for developing place attachments (Torkington, 2011; 2013).

At the same time, in talking about their experiences of living in the Algarve, these migrants discursively construct a very bounded sense of place - although the boundaries are typically imagined rather than having actual physical borders - within which they live alongside other “Brits” in a somewhat self-marginalised, but highly privileged, existence (see Torkington, 2011 for a full discussion of this). In this way, the idea of living in the “container” of a “*Quality of Life Reserve*” could well be appealing. The concept of a “Reserve” has discursive connotations of both security and exclusivity, as well as privilege and luxury (think, for example, of gold reserves, and Reserve wines). The link to natural reserves also brings in the currently fashionable discourse of nature and eco-tourism (again, a type of lifestyle practice associated with the relatively affluent despite its seemingly ethical foundations). At the same time the image (of the woman on a bicycle) seems to denote a type of leisurely freedom - from the constraints of a life dictated by work and stress: in a nutshell, the “place in the sun” that lifestyle migrants are apparently seeking out. It is also worth noting how that the image denotes a *young* woman: the idea that this type of migration is purely for wealthy northern European retirees is no longer accurate, since surveys have shown that younger people, often with children, are increasingly making this type of move.



This particular sign is therefore a good example of how the discursive landscaping of a place is part and parcel of the physical landscaping of a place. By using the English language in such a highly visible manner, English-speaking people are being positioned as “belonging” in this landscape, and since the affordances of the landscape are being heavily associated with global social practices that signal a certain kind of leisured lifestyle (another billboard from the same campaign, with the same slogan, depicts a young woman jogging along a deserted beach at sunset), it is not only their presence but their *right to enjoy* this type of lifestyle in this particular place that is being somehow legitimised. In short, privileged place-identities are being shaped through the landscape itself for potential lifestyle migrants and also being reinforced for those already “living the dream”. The message is that the transience of the traditional tourist experience can be extended indefinitely and turned into a way of life.

## 7. Transilvania: Multilingual flavours

The “Transilvania” shop is located in the outskirts of Almancil, a small town a few kilometres inland. It belongs to the same *Concelho* (municipal district) as Vilamoura, but serves mostly as a support town for the nearby upmarket coastal resort developments. From its origins as a small, rural village that lost a great deal of its population to outward emigration in the latter half of the twentieth century, it now has a large migrant population, from a variety of national origins<sup>10</sup>, but notably over the past decade, a large Romanian community has settled in the town. The “Transilvania” shop is owned by a Romanian family and principally run one of the daughters, who arrived in Portugal when she was twelve years old. Having gone through the local high school and now in the final year of a university degree course, she is multilingual, speaking fluent Portuguese and English as well as Romanian.

Outside the shop is a large, clearly visible sign in three languages: Romanian, Portuguese and English (*Magazin Românesc / Mercearia Romena / Romanian Grocery*). Above the door is another large placard with the name of the shop, and underneath, in the same three languages, the inscription *Gusturi Românești / Sabores Romanos / Romanian Flavours* (Figure 3). Although the signs are visually balanced in

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<sup>10</sup> Figures suggest that around one third of the population is comprised of foreign nationals.

terms of the salience given to each language through graphic design (the same font, colour and size for each phrase), the order in which the three languages are presented suggests something about the ranking of importance of the intended receivers of the sign.

**Figure 3: Shop front in Almancil**



I asked the shopkeeper why she had designed signs in this multilingual way. She explained that obviously she needed Romanian, since the shop is selling Romanian food products (imported from Romania) specifically aimed at the Romanian community. Portuguese is there because “it’s obligatory”, and anyway she hoped to attract some Portuguese customers (although this had not really happened). Finally, since the shop is in an area where there are a lot of tourists, she thought they might be curious and come into the shop. In fact, she told me, many English people do come into the shop – although not so much tourists as “people who live round here”. Many of them have Romanian people working for them (often as domestic help, or as kitchen or waiting staff in restaurants that they own) and because of that, she said, they know something about Romanian food products and visit her shop because they are curious to try them. They also like to try the Romanian wines that she stocks.

This is, in fact, the only example I have found of highly visible Romanian in the linguistic landscape of this area. However, it does seem to be emblematic of the fact that the Romanian community has grown enough over the past decade and become

stable enough to enable businesses to start up which are run by Romanians and which target the Romanian community. Until very recently, this kind of intra-community entrepreneurship was confined to the northern European migrants, who had sufficient economic resources to start businesses catering to their fellow nationals, most of whom were unable or unwilling to communicate with the local Portuguese community and so provided a large target segment for services offered in their own languages. However, this type of entrepreneurship among eastern European migrants remains relatively limited. The shopkeeper told me she knew of just two other similar Romanian shops across the Algarve region.

What is also interesting is that the dynamic young proprietor has made a clear effort to cash in on the opportunities offered by tourism – rather than targeting the Romanian community exclusively, she is clearly aware of the marketing strategies aimed at attracting a clientele who are curious about other cultures and their traditional products. By choosing the word “*Flavours*” (and “*Sabores*” in Portuguese), she is showing a discursive awareness of the current vogue for “exotic” and “authentic” food products, culinary styles and gastronomy which has been greatly encouraged by lifestyle magazines, TV programmes and indeed the tourist industry as a whole. In this way, the shop owner is positioning herself as a provider of “exotic” products for a “foreign” clientele, as well as “home” products for a “displaced” community. The very choice of shop name, in fact, is making the shop not only a transnational location, but is also bringing the best-known tourist region in Romania into the best-known tourist area of Portugal.

In the shop window, I noticed that two hand-made signs were displayed (A4-sized computer print outs), each advertising services in Romanian only: one for translation, legal and documentation services, and one for beauty therapies and massages. I asked the shopkeeper why she thought there were so few of these types of signs written in Romanian on display in the area. She replied that Romanians are still not really “employment generators”, nor are they self-employed with services to offer other Romanians. Most Romanians in the town are employed by Portuguese or British, or are looking for employment, and therefore they might write small ads (to put on shop notice-boards, for example), in Portuguese or English, offering services such as

domestic work, gardening, building, babysitting, and so on. In sum, the presence of Romanian in the landscape of the town and surrounding area is negligible.

## **8. Discussion and conclusions**

This paper has aimed to illustrate how it can be worthwhile studying the semiotic landscape not only as a bounded “whole”, but also by examining in detail specific signs (or acts of communication) which are both spatially and historically emplaced. These signs can be analysed as nexus points for various circulating discourses, through which broader cycles of socio-cultural practices flow and interact with other elements of the surrounding landscape and ethnoscape. The discursive practices that contribute to the on-going process of shaping landscapes can thus be considered as spatial practices which help to actively construct localities. In this way, an analysis of elements of the discursive landscaping of a place can focus on “how different linguistic resources are used, different worlds evoked, different possibilities engaged in” (Pennycook, 2010: 69) in the complex processes of place-making and place-identity construction.

Fundamental to place-making and place-identity processes is the notion of inclusion/exclusion of social groups. In the case of Vilamoura, it is clear that the place is actively being constructed through discursive landscaping as a space where English-speaking tourists and “lifestyle” migrants are not only welcome but also legitimized as “belonging”. This then forges a privileged place-identity for these social groups and reinforces an acceptance of the type of social practices associated with them – whether the more transient tourists and their leisure- and entertainment-based activities or the practices associated with settling in the area: principally the purchase of real estate that has been designed and built specifically for this social group. In this way, the physical landscape as well as the semiotic landscape speaks volumes about the social inclusion of relatively wealthy northern Europeans.

In the case of Almancil, despite the significant presence of a stable Romanian community (many have been living in the town for at least ten years), there is a noticeable absence of Romanian in the landscape. Whilst it may be expected that “official” signs will not use this language, and nor will signage that is explicitly directed at the northern European tourist and migration industries, it is surprising that there

has not been a “bottom-up” filtering through of this language into the landscape. Other research (particularly in city/urban contexts) has indeed shown that in certain neighbourhoods, where particular ethnic groups are concentrated, the linguistic landscaping process means that community languages become quite visible (see, for example, Blommaert, 2010; Collins and Slembrouck, 2004). Further research would be needed to determine why this is not the case in this instance; however, I would venture a suggestion that it may have something to do with the general willingness of these Romanian migrants to fully integrate into the local community, not only by achieving a good command of Portuguese (and, usually, English) but also through strong place attachments which generate a feeling of “being at home”. Interestingly, the reasons given for settling in the area are often very similar to those of the northern Europeans – i.e. a perceived better quality of life and lifestyle affordances (even if these may differ somewhat from those cited by northern Europeans).<sup>11</sup>

In other words, the exclusion of the “community” language of this group of migrants does not in fact seem to contribute to their social exclusion in any immediately obvious way, although the absence of Romanian from the landscape does give a clear message about the relative status of the language and, by extension, its speakers, not only in the local geosemiotics but in terms of the social positioning of the group as a whole. Although this study has not specifically addressed other eastern European languages in the Algarvian landscape, it can be noted that the languages of large migrant groups, such as Ukrainians, Moldavians and Bulgarians (see Table 1 above) are again noticeable by their almost total absence.

It could therefore be argued that whilst tourists and lifestyle migrants from the UK (and other northern European origins) are pushed to front-of-stage position through the semiotic landscape, the “back-stage” position of other migrant groups, who tend to work in construction and low-skilled service industry jobs, is reinforced by a lack of presence in the same landscape. This seems, therefore, to be a reflection of the socio-economic structure of the region, which continues to be first and foremost a tourist destination. The languages on display are the languages of tourism and, by extension, of economic and symbolic power.

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<sup>11</sup> See Perdigão Ribeiro (forthcoming) for more discussion on this.

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