

Au Pairs: Cultural Tourists or Exploited Waged Migrants - Evidence from Returnees to Slovakia

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This paper explores the nature of how au pair experiences are constituted as both cultural tourism and waged labour. As such, the paper contributes to the growing research which situates tourism in relation to mobility studies, and it also recognises the increasingly complex and hybrid forms of both tourism and migration. The argument is developed through a case study of Slovaks, mostly but not all women, who have returned from periods as au pairs in the UK. First, it argues that au pairs are distinctive from other migrants working in domestic service, and from tourists. Their positions have to be understood in terms of a particular regulatory framework, temporal restrictions, living-in conditions, and the blurring of rights and responsibilities. Secondly, understanding au pair experiences as being spatially-constituted provides greater insights into their experiences and outcomes: this requires a study not only of the full cycle of migration, but also of how they are embedded in particular spatial networks.