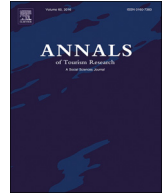


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When sea becomes home

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ABSTRACT

This paper speaks to the home/away debate in tourism research through a case study of leisure boating. Practice theory and affordance theory, participant observation and interviews with boaters touring or departing from Bohuslän, Sweden are used to illustrate how changes in material affordances and material setup co-transform practices and meanings. Through the introduction of house-like facilities, powered by the boat's engines and employing home skills, some boats afford a family/single person a more comfortable and independent "stay at home" on the sea than in the past, while boating resembling camping is becoming an ex-practice. However, boats continue to afford mobility, for which boating skills are required. This paper thus challenges the theoretical opposition in tourism studies between home and away.

Introduction

Leisure boating has witnessed a general increase in the number, size and engine power of boats ([SwedishTransportAgency, 2016](#); [InterConnection, 2006](#); [Laaksonen, 2012](#)). In Scandinavia, boating is a popular leisure activity, and the Bohuslän coast in Sweden is an area frequently visited by leisure boaters ([Riskföreningen, 2010](#)). A study of visitors to Bohuslän in boats reports a trend towards buying or wishing for larger and/or better-equipped boats and a correlation between boat size and number of nights spent on board ([Leposa, 2017](#)). As a corollary of this trend, I found that leisure boaters refer to their boats as 'summer homes' and talk about 'getting away', as exemplified below:

Today, people have enough money to buy a boat to live in, and it's so expensive to buy a summer house. If you want to buy a summer house by the coast, it's crazy. So a lot of people buy a boat instead. So a boat is a summer house and people don't care so much about sailing.

I like to get away from the normal life back home and be out in the open, at sea and on the islands, to experience new places and relax. I guess, [it is] also the combination of sun, water and water sports, bathing, and all that is very different from the things we do when the kids are at school and we are working.

Family leisure boating became popular in Sweden in the 1940s and was typically done on a 25 foot long 'people's boat' ([Sjöhistoriska, 2018](#)). Today this type of boating is done in larger boats, as a boater visiting Bohuslän on a 30 foot boat explains: "When we bought this boat 35 years ago, this was a big boat but nowadays it's a very small boat compare to the others." In the context of the trend for boats to become not only larger but also better equipped, this paper explores the material affordances and practices associated with the two aspects of boating: as a summer house on the one hand and a means to 'get away' on the other. These two aspects appear dissonant in relation to home/away debate in tourism studies, where tourism is traditionally conceptualized as an away and not a home activity.

Boating and the sea are strongly linked with boaters' identities and sense of belonging. [Jalas \(2006\)](#) shows how boaters create

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their identities through engaging with the materiality of their boats. Humberstone and Brown (2016) reveal how seas shape identities, and Anderson, Anderson, and Peters (2014) report on kayakers' sense of belonging to the water. However, studies on emergence of a more practical/material sense of 'home' and belonging in relation to 'housing'¹ in marine tourism are lacking. I argue that the connotation 'home' is also materially co-constituted and emerges through material affordances and practices.

Traditionally, tourism has been conceptualized as based on two contrasting nodes, 'home' and 'away', associated with different localities and activities (Bærenholdt et al., 2004; Hui, 2008; White & White, 2007; Larsen, 2008; Shani, 2013). One of the first major studies of tourism claimed that 'tours are circular structures, and that the last destination is the same as the point of origin: home' (MacCannell (1976: 168). Thereafter, Urry (1990: 3) described tourists as being 'outside the normal places of residence and work'. In a similar vein, UNWTO (2005) defines tourism as comprising *activities* and staying in *places differing* from so called '*usual environment*' (Larsen & Urry, 2011). A tourist was assumed to be a person who goes away from home to do 'extraordinary' activities before returning back to 'everyday' life at home. Thus, tourism was associated not only with 'extraordinary places', spatially 'away' from home, but also with 'extraordinary life', i.e. activities different from those engaged in the home. 'Home' was a place to which a tourist returns to resume the routine of 'everyday life'. From this perspective, visiting the Bohuslän coast in boats would be seen as a typical tourism activity, undertaken at 'away' places and disassociated from home and home-like practices; however, as the excerpt above shows, the boater talks about a boat as a place to 'live in'.

Recent tourism studies challenge the traditional home/away separation and criticise the neglect of the relevance of 'home' (Larsen, 2008; Hui, 2008; Cresswell, 2006; Hannam, 2009). Larsen (2008), for example, argues that leisure practices intersect with everyday life. Hui (2008), suggests that home should not be overlooked as a potential tourist site: the idea of 'a *home space* that stands in opposition to a *tourism space* is insufficient and fraught with difficulties' (Hui, 2008: 291).

In line with this recent research, this study challenges the theoretical home/away separation through a study of leisure boating in Scandinavia. Through an analytical focus on material affordances and practices I study *how the emergence of larger and more equipped private leisure boats is challenging the distinction between home and away in tourism studies*.

Theoretical inspirations

In order to explore the emergence of larger and better equipped boats further in relation to home-making and touring this study brings together affordance theory and practice theory with a principal focus on boaters' engagement with materials of the boat. To understand materiality and the related emerging affordances, I draw on affordance theory (Gibson, 1977); whereas practice theory (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012) is employed to elucidate the changes that have occurred through taking advantage of these affordances.

The sea, the shore and the boats, afford a variety of *action possibilities* (Gibson, 2014) in relation to boaters, such as floating and moving. Furthermore, as boats become larger and better equipped, additional affordances may emerge. Since affordances are manifold, practice theory is helpful for identifying which affordances, in particular, are taken advantage of, especially in the context of boats becoming larger and better equipped. To analyse practices and how they change, I draw on Shove et al. (2012), and conceptualise leisure boating practice as comprising three elements: *materials*, *skills* and *meaning*. Several human made and non-human-made materials are involved in boating practices, for example, engine, galley, sleeping area, sea, the shore and boaters' bodies. Skills are possessed by boaters as mental understanding (know-how) as well as being embodied in skills, including both home skills (e.g. cooking, washing) and boating skills (e.g. hoisting sails, dropping anchor, mooring the boat). Finally, meaning is defined by Shove as 'the social and symbolic significance of participation at any one moment' (Shove et al., 2012: 22). In contrast to socially constructed meaning, affordances are seen as being discovered as we engage with things (Sanders, 1993). For example if a boat with an engine is given to a child, they might play with it in the harbour in the evening. While boat affords play to the child, adult boaters in the harbour might find this inappropriate. Similarly, while new features can be added to boats, increasing action possibilities, which of these are tapped into is shaped through social processes. Certain practices, such as use of the boat as a house, may or may not become socially acceptable. Thus, meaning is both discovered and shaped through social processes.

Related to new boat features and meanings, potential changes in boating practices can be understood through examining how links between the aforementioned elements (meaning, skills and materials) are formed or disappear, in a three-stage process (Shove et al., 2012): (1) the elements exist, but are not yet integrated (practice not yet established); (2) the elements are actively interconnected (established practice, which persists over time); and (3) links are no longer made (ex-practice).

Notes on methodology

The idea of studying boating practices and affordances in relation to the concept of 'home' and mobility in tourism studies emerged through an iterative process (Whitehead, 2005). During a preliminary study carried out in summer 2012, I interviewed fifty randomly selected Bohuslän visitors in boats about their boat-life, how they got started, and what changes they had observed, if any. After application of open coding (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), several themes emerged and, among these, I became aware of an apparent dissonance. On the one hand, boaters talked about boating as an opportunity to 'get away' from home; on the other hand, a substantial number of boaters referred to their boats as their 'summer home'. I identified affordance theory and practice theory (Shove

¹ Here, 'house' and 'home' are used interchangeably, reflecting how informants (boaters) used the terms. I am aware of the more metaphorical connotation of home; however, in this paper, I argue that 'house' through its materiality also co-constitutes a sense of 'home'.

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