



Conflicts and contestations. Rural populations' perspectives on the second homes phenomenon

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A B S T R A C T

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In response to demands to restructure and diversify their economies, many rural communities have welcomed the expanding phenomenon of second homes. However, while the second home owners bring new resources to the host communities, the literature also suggests that large second home populations in rural communities provide fertile ground for a number of economic, social and cultural conflicts and contestations. The present paper analyses the views of the local rural populations on the second home phenomenon, with particular attention to variation in these views, both within and between the rural communities (municipalities). The analysis uses material from the survey *City, countryside, second homes 2008*, which was conducted among a large-scale and representative sample of the population in Norwegian rural second home municipalities. The first section of the paper addresses the rural populations' stance towards the second home phenomenon, both in general and as it unfolds in their own vicinity. Results show generally positive views on second home development; however, the analysis identifies a substantial minority which is negative to the second home expansion. Nevertheless, the second section shows that even those rurals who are negative towards further developments of second homes largely report harmonious social relationships with the second home population that is already present. Third, the paper presents and discusses a multivariate logistic regression model to analyse how different segments of the rural population vary in their views on second home phenomena. Here, results suggest differences at both micro and macro levels: the local rural elites, in particular those with direct economic interests in the second home sector, are most positive towards further development. On the municipality level, resistance towards second homes is stronger in municipalities with a high density of second homes. Nevertheless, a high growth rate in the number of second homes, due to high investments, seems to increase local support.

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1. Changing ruralities

Western countrysides are currently undergoing major socio-cultural transformation following the restructuring of their economic foundations (Woods, 2005; Falk and Labao, 2003; Hoggart and Paniagua, 2001; Marsden et al., 1993). Whereas the countryside traditionally relied on exports of commodities by the primary industries (agriculture, fisheries, and extractive industries) to urban markets, it has become increasingly characterised by its role as producer of rural services, experiences, and quality of life. It is no longer only a site of production but as much a product in its own right; advertised, transacted and consumed within the framework of market institutions (Van Auken, 2010). Integral to

these developments are processes of commodification, privatisation and individualisation of rural landscapes as well as a growing presence of extra-local actors with interests in and powers to affect the futures of the rural communities.

The 'new' second home phenomenon in many rural communities represents a paradigmatic example of these developments (Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen, 2010). Stronger in numbers and more visible in the rural landscapes, both physically (second home buildings) and socially (second home users), the phenomenon demonstrates how the rural socio-cultural spaces have been reconfigured in the wake of these economic transformations (Almås et al., 2008). In some rural communities, the visiting second home population outnumbers the first home population in terms of both houses and, in peak seasons, humans (Steinecke, 2007).

The restructuring processes, including the introduction of new actors and their various kinds of capitals – economic, cultural and social (Bourdieu, 1986) – change and challenge the traditional rural

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social fabric and the existing power relations among the local rural actors. Some are better positioned to survive and benefit in the post/late-modern rural economic order, often at the expense of less favoured participants in the rural societies. Thus, the growth of the second home sector gives rise to a number of new challenges, conflicts and contestations in rural communities.

On the one hand, the second home expansion is often, though not universally (Gallent et al., 2005) welcomed by local and supra-local policy and planning actors, based on the assumption that second homes and other forms of rural tourism provide vital resources for development of economically sustainable countryside in line with the demands of the rural restructuring processes. For example, in Norway several white papers over the last years have encouraged farmers to utilise their uncultivated land as a resource for commercial activities to supplement their agricultural revenues (e.g. MA, 1999; MLGRD, 2009; see also Rønningen et al., 2001), e.g. by offering land and services for second home owners. At the municipal policy level, there has also been great interest in the second home sector as source of economic growth. Most new second homes have been built as part of larger developments, which are commonly initiated by, or at least involve close cooperation with, local planning authorities in hopes of stimulating the local economy.

On the other hand, many of the local people often perceive the increased presence of second homes and their users in their neighbourhoods as a challenge to their traditional rural ways of life. For example, second homes raise questions about the very nature of rurality and what it *should* be, and about which actors have legitimate claims and powers to take part in the shaping of the countryside (Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen, 2010). Research on second homes abounds with examples of local rural resistance to second home developments (for example, see Van Auken and Rye, 2011), including the physical destruction of second home structures (Hall and Müller, 2004; Gallent et al., 2005). In Wales in the 1970s, protesters even held that the influx of non-Welsh second home owners was not only 'socially unjust; it was also a serious threat to the Welsh language and to the sense of national identity' (see Coppock, 1977a: 201).

Such resistance should be no surprise. Rural restructuring processes imply a reshuffling of positions and powers within rural communities. These developments favour some actors, while others lose out. Thus, despite the assumption of many policy makers that rural second home developments provide attractive opportunities for rural communities, the degree to which the rural lay populations share these positive evaluations of the second home phenomenon is questionable. A further issue is whether different segments of the population have inconsistent and possibly conflicting views.

The object of this paper is to examine the degree and distribution of popular support and resistance to the second home phenomenon empirically at the micro level in rural communities. A further aim is exploration of various socio-structural and spatial dimensions that generate differences in rural actors' evaluations of the second home developments in their rural municipalities. To what extent are rurals' perspectives on second home development related to their social positions in the rural field (*within*-municipality differences), and further, are there differences at community level in how the local populations relate to the second homes phenomenon (*between*-municipality differences)?

Specifically, the paper asks two research questions:

- 1: What are the locals' views on the second home development in their local communities (municipalities)?
- 2: How do the rural populations differ in their stance towards the second home development?

These research questions are examined through quantitative methods and materials, using data from the large Norwegian nationwide and statistically representative survey *City, countryside and second homes 2008*. Unlike most research in the field, which has primarily been of a qualitative nature and/or has involved the use of case study designs, this survey allows for mapping of the wider rural population's views on the second home phenomenon. The study's national context is that of Norway, where the second home phenomenon has characteristics that both parallel and differ from that of other nations, and the paper attempts to address the importance of the national context in analysis of rural populations' perspectives on the second home phenomenon.

2. Blessings and curses - a review of the literature

The unfolding of the second home phenomenon has been described in the literature as, to quote Coppock (1977b), both a 'curse and blessing'. The work edited by Coppock explored the second home industries in different Western countries, clearly showing how the phenomenon differs historically, socially, and culturally between countries due to their specific national contexts. However, Coppock's work also demonstrated striking similarities in research questions and policy challenges between countries, and between the research agendas of the 1970s and today.

At the centre of these discussions has been the economic impact of second home development in rural areas (see Coppock, 1977b; Farstad et al., 2008; Gallent et al., 2005; Hall and Müller, 2004 for overviews). First, second home development stimulates the local economy, in both the short and the long run. In the building phase, new entrants in the second home market will invest money in land, benefiting farmers who sell plots, and in buildings, providing contracts for the construction industry. Money from land sales necessarily finds its way to the local actor, the farmer. It is more difficult to estimate the local share of the building investments, as the second home owners may utilise extra-local actors.

Second, local communities are expected to benefit from the second home population after the building phase, as they use local businesses to provide various products and services. This spending benefits a wider range of local actors: grocery retailers and other shops, petrol stations, artisans, restaurants and cafeterias, entertainment providers, etc. However, it is difficult to estimate the extent of these outlays, which will vary between second home locations. The second home owners may also contribute to the incomes of the local public sector by paying various charges, e.g. land tax, refuse collection charges, and other fees. However, the costs of adjusting the infrastructure of public services to meet the demands of the second home populations may exceed these income sources (see Gallent et al., 2005).

Critics further suggest that while second homes may enhance the development of a new, and more diversified, foundation for the local economy, activities following in the wake of rural tourism primarily generate work that is low-paid, seasonal and part-time, and low-skilled. This is unattractive both for individual careers and for the development of robust local labour markets. However, second home development seems, at least in the Norwegian case, to create more attractive jobs than other forms of rural tourism, e.g. employment in the rural construction sector is traditionally full-time, permanent, and well-paid.

In general, the scope and content of economic impacts seem to vary between countries, and between regions within each country. This is due to the specific characters of different market segments. For example, Van Auken and Rye (2011) show how the second home phenomena in the USA and in Norway vary greatly in the degree of commodification and commercialisation, where a far

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