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Touristic transcendence and post modern flitting: An exploration of the experiences of second home owners

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SUMMARY

The focus of this article is the experience of the tourist as s/he moves between ordinary everyday non-tourist life and tourist life in the current postmodern consumption context. A comprehensive review of the existing literature on second home consumption is presented. There is some emphasis on how it is practiced by the Irish second home owner. This is a group that has been identified as being relatively under-researched in a consumer behaviour context; it is a group that is affluent, growing and heterogeneous (Mottiar and Quinn 2003). The vacation home is a complex issue within tourism being viewed as 'a space between the ordinary and the extraordinary' (Aronsson 2004: 76). There is a perspective that study of second home owners 'would assist in the search of a more universal understanding of what it means to the tourist to be a tourist' (Jaakson 1986: 389); the themes generated in the study of second home owners are useful in the study of tourist consumers in a general sense. The literature on post modernism would suggest that the contemporary consumer eschews a sense of rootedness and belongingness. This article problematises this contention by asked whether second home owners are seeking a sanctuary away from home as opposed to a disconnected series of random destinations.

Keywords:
second homes; consumption; transcendence; post modern; mobility; tourism

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this article is the experience of the tourist as s/he moves between ordinary everyday non-tourist life and tourist life in the current postmodern consumption context. The specific task undertaken is a review of the literature on second home consumption, with some emphasis on how it is practiced by the Irish second home owner. This is a group that has been identified as being relatively under-researched in a consumer behaviour context; it is a group that is affluent, growing and heterogeneous (Mottiar and Quinn 2003).

The vacation home is a complex issue within tourism being viewed as 'a space between the ordinary and the extraordinary' (Aronsson 2004: 76). There is a perspective that study of second home owners 'would assist in the search of a more universal understanding of what it means to the tourist to be a tourist' (Jaakson 1986: 389); the themes generated in the study of second home owners are useful in the study of tourist consumers in a general sense.

The demand for 'alternative homes' appears to be growing considerably in a number of countries worldwide (Kaltenborn 1998). For example in Norway, it was estimated in 2002 that every second family in the country has access to at least one home (Flognfeldt 2004). This echoes Clout's (1977: 50) earlier finding among French second home users that 'many more have access to second homes than own them'. Their recent growth in numbers and use of second homes is simply symptomatic of broader social trends including modern working patterns, preferences in leisure consumption, improvement in personal mobility and higher wages (Gallent and Tewdwr-Jones 2000). Jackson (2002: 4) comments that '...the second home is becoming a more obligatory piece of the American dream'. There has long been a tradition of second home, or holiday home, ownership in Europe; the Scandinavian tradition of cottaging and the Balearic practice of seasonal dual residence are examples. To date the Irish experience has been different to that of mainland Europe where second home owners live in city apartments and spend leisure time in summer houses. Ireland has traditionally had one of the lowest population density figures of any European country (CSO 2002). Relative to the general European situation, in Ireland, significant levels of second home ownership are a recent phenomenon (Quinn 2004).

Whilst it is known that the number of Irish travelling to their own holiday homes in Europe has trebled since 2000 (CSO 2004), there is little reliable numerical data available. That Irish consumption of the second home, both domestic and foreign, has shown a marked increase is evidenced by the number of foreign property exhibitors in the market, the increase in domestic building activity in traditional country and coastline holiday areas, the increased professionalism of estate agents in their approach to this business (noted also in Norway by Flognfeldt 2004), the significant increase in primary home equity which has had a positive impact on the second home market (also reported by Hobson (2002) with regard to the US), the recent interest by the Revenue Commissioners in those purchasing second properties, and in the anecdotal belief that 'having a second home in the sun has become almost de rigueur these days' (Foley 2005). However, that there is a lack of secondary numerical data, more particularly comparable data among countries, on multiple residence is not unusual, 'we do not think about and routinely collect information on multiple residence' (McHugh, Hogan and Happel 1995). What numerical information is available concerning the Irish market comes mainly from the estate agents who estimate that around 60,000 Irish people have bought properties abroad, 40,000 of these in Spain (Keena 2004), spending in the range of €75,000 - €259,000 plus each (Khan 2005).

THE SECOND HOME OWNER

Despite a long history of research on second homes (Williams, King and Warnes 2004), which included contributions from Aldskogius (1969), Ragatz (1970), Bielckus (1977), Clout (1977), Coppock (1977), Wolfe (1977); Rothman (1978), Shucksmith (1983) and Jaakson's (1986) seminal article, there was relatively little written on the subject of second home ownership until the late 90s. Then there was a spurt of interest in the subject 'due to growth in interregional and international retirement migration, increased recognition of tourism (economic, environment, social), and deliberate use of second homes as an economic development tool' (Hall and Müller 2004).

Most of this literature has focussed on the economic, environmental, social and demographic impacts of second, or holiday, homes on the local community (Casado-Diaz 1999). Additionally, these studies (for example Bourrat (2000), Williams and Hall (2000), Mottiar and Quinn (2001) have primarily presented the perspective of the local community rather than that of the second homeowner. Exceptions to this are Buller and Hoggart's (1994) account of the interaction between British second home owners and British permanent migrants to France, and Mottiar and Quinn's (2003) study of the role second home owners played in the controversy that arose in regard to planned tourism development in Courtown, Co. Wexford, Ireland.

A major critique of this more recent (through the 90s to date) work is that 'the focus on the local has somewhat delayed significant broader conceptualisation regarding second homes' (Müller 2004).

We have scant empirical evidence of which role(s) 'cabin life' plays in people's lives; what motivates the use of recreation homes; what makes them attractive; or what is it about our time and development of society that seems to increase the demand for alternative homes .

Jaakson's (1986) study of Canadian second home owners was based primarily on survey data gathered from 300 second home owners over twenty years and generated ten 'broad themes of meaning' (routine and novelty, inversion, back-to-nature, identity, surety, continuity, work, elitism, aspiration, and time and distance). His objective was to use these themes 'to explore what the second home means to the second home tourist'. Jaakson concluded that second home owning is unique but that it 'exhibits similarities common to most if not all tourism'. His assertion that 'the second home owner is a form of permanent tourist' has implications for the consumption of tourism in a post-modern context and raises the question of what now distinguishes ordinary life and non-ordinary tourist life.

Chaplin's (2000) investigation of British owners of second homes in France draws upon Jaakson's work. Specifically, the aim of the study was to explore consumption criteria and practices, the patterns of owners' lives, and the constructions they form of their identities as property owners in France. Lack of commodification and time out from 'paramount identities' were found to be important elements of the second home consumption experience. Chaplin presents a typology of second homeowners: The Creative Homemaker, The Regular Migrants, The Enthusiasts, The Exclusivists, and The Relaxers. In contrast to Jaakson, Chaplin concludes that second home consumption is not a form of tourism.

These last two authors in particular provide a solid basis from which to examine the phenomenon of second home consumption.

Defining the second home owner

Definition of second homeownership is difficult. Second homes are not a discrete type, clearly distinguished from other kinds of accommodation, they 'form a somewhat arbitrarily identified group within a continuum' (Coppock 1977: 2); they are 'seen as an urban rural continuum, a housing tourism continuum, a work/leisure continuum or a work retirement continuum' (Coppock 1977: 211). Additionally, and in a broad sense, this difficulty in defining what owning a second home is about is somewhat based on 'a persistent confusion of categories between leisure and tourism' (Crouch 2000: 1), or a view of tourism and recreation as part of a wider conceptualisation of leisure.

The term second home seems itself to be inadequate given current changes in 'the nature of place affiliation' and in view of 'the emergence of more peripatetic lifestyles'; significant numbers of consumers are involved in multiple residential options. Specifically '...the term second homes is becoming misleading, alternative or multiple homes may be a more appropriate' (Williams, King and Warnes 2004: 112), or perhaps 'residential tourist' (King, Warnes and Williams 2000). Use of these terms would help cope with the 'chaotic conceptualisation' that surrounds the literature on second home owning (Williams *et al.* 2004: 98).

The wide variety of European consumers makes it impossible to sketch a composite profile of the second home owner in Europe (Go 1988: 25). Restrictive migration definitions in the geography literature have not been of help, 'little attention is given to the notion that significant populations are involved in trips between two or more places and that many people have established multiple residences in Western societies' (Roseman 1992).

Salletmaier's (1993 in Gallent and Tewdwr-Jones 2000) conception of the second home is of a space for recreation and communication that may be 'vital for the users' personal identities. Second-home tourism has been defined as the recreational use of second homes by their owners, friends or relatives of the owners, or vacationers who rent them (Tress 2002).

There has been discussion of whether or not second home use should be defined as tourism. Dower (1977) maintained that the critical point about second homes

is that they are at the point of overlap between housing and tourism – 'neither squarely one nor the other, but having the nature and implications of both'. Cohen (1974) identified second home tourists as 'marginal', due to lack of novelty in their travel behaviour. Chaplin (2000: 62) does not agree that second homeowners are tourists but does acknowledge that they share 'the need to escape' with 'regular' tourists. Additionally, she writes that 'holidays are consumed as experiences of novelty, or breaks from routine but are often also enjoyed through familiarity and continuity' *of the second home*. O'Reilly's (2003) study of British migrants in Spain's Costa del Sol claims these migrants are not tourists but does acknowledge Cohen and Taylor's (1976) idea of archetypal free area, 'the institutionalized setting for temporary excursions from the domain of paramount reality' as applying, 'they live in a holiday space'. Despite 'living' in Spain on a permanent basis, these people are not engaged in 'everyday life' in the way they would be at home (in Britain). They live in 'a free space' away from reality, they live in a holiday world. Jaakson (1986: 389) firmly places second home consumption on the touristic continuum by specifying that 'the frequency and periodicity of trips differentiate second home tourism from other types of domestic and international tourism'; he confirms that 'second home owners are a significant part of domestic tourism'.

The following sections explore the issue of second home ownership in the context of two particular post modern themes: mobility and de-differentiation.

Postmodernism mobility

Postmodernism is said to be characterised by mobility, what Urry (2001) describes as 'a compulsion to mobility'. This exists not just among the young but, as Gustafson (2001) has detailed, also among older consumers. He outlines the variety of mobilities engaged in by second home owners, 'Mobility between first and second residences, other journeys abroad or within the two countries, short pleasure trips, daily walks and other forms of physical mobilities in their daily lives' (Gustafson 2001: 3).

The concepts of roots (place attachment) and routes (mobility) are not necessarily in opposition to one another (Aronsson 2004: 76). The ability to 'sustain mobility and place attachment contemporaneously' was clearly a factor in the lives of Gustafson's (2001:

378) study participants, they felt at home in both Spain and Sweden. However, when visiting the vacation home second home owners were found to be 'relatively local in their activities' (Aronsson 2004).

Olwig (1997: 17) writing from an anthropological perspective are impressed by the growing importance of travel in the modern world. They conclude that 'we are beginning to critique the idea that settled life in particular places necessarily is a 'normal' state of being; movement constitutes a normal condition of life for a great many people'.

Williams *et al.* (2004) use Urry's (2000) concept of 'scapes and flows' to discuss mobility. They present changes in tourism migration flows that have particular relevance for understanding flows to second homes:

• Changes in mobility related to the fragmentation of work and leisure time, with more opportunities for short visits to second homes

• A shift from migration to circulation…increasing numbers of people have peripatetic lifestyles, they circulate between different places for consumption and production reasons; second home owners are driven by lifestyle from place to place

• The relative growth of consumption led rather than production related migration: labour and retirement migration, often informed by climate and rural landscapes

They contend that the meaning and roles of second homes has changed because the nature of mobility has changed. A practical example of the operation of scapes and flows is that since the introduction of direct flights from Dublin to Nice in 2004, there has been a mini boom in the purchase of properties along the French Riviera by Irish consumers (O'Connell 2005). The detail of tenure at the second home has been found to be reliant on matters as mundane as a ferry boat schedule (Grimstad and Lyngø 1993: 48)

The very nature of home has been called into question 'by the growing number of households in the developed world with the ability to allocate their time independently of a single workplace, and so adopt more mobile lifestyles and many have several homes' (Hall and Müller 2004: 6). Duval (2004: 89) considers that when people are mobile, 'we should recognise that the con-

cept of home is not as bounded, and thus flexes with the mobility of individuals'.

The alternate experience of each home is commented upon by Löfgren (1999: 153) when he writes about 'the magic of movement' and states that 'It is the break between the two homes, the two settings which integrate them. It is a very well integrated alterity'. Aronsson, (2004: 77) comments that '...many vacation owners may invest as much time, money and work in their "secondary" home as they do in their "permanent" one'.

Hall and Müller (2004) conclude that 'When the norm in society is mobility, it is hard to decide which place is the ordinary and which is the extraordinary'; there is a de-differentiation in experiences of the two homes, they are equally valuable experiences.

More fundamentally, does globalization undermine locality to the extent that being in a particular geographical place is no longer a prerequisite for feeling at home? (Huber and O'Reilly 2004). Are consumers capable feeling at home to the full extent of their mobility? Mobility may have equipped consumers with the skills to feel at home anywhere they choose.

Postmodernism de-differentiation

Many authors have characterised the current cultural environment as a post-modern one (Giddens 1994; Bauman 2000; Firat 2001). All experience is viewed as authentic or real, and practices that 'we understand by leisure/tourism merge with other areas of life, and work regimes are becoming increasingly flexible' (Crouch 2000: 2); individuals can determine for themselves what is and what is not leisure (Rojek 2000: 43); the distinction between the everyday and the holiday is becoming increasingly fuzzy (Crang and Franklin 2001). Further acknowledgement of this is Urry's (1990) view that post-tourists are free of the constraints of high or low culture.

In the postmodernist world second home ownership is evidence of de-differentiation; post-modern living involves a rapid spanning of time, an ingestion of fast moving images and stimuli across what may previously have been described as distance. Consumers can move easily between homes, bring home with them, or find it everywhere. During the 1970s and 80s tourist life

was conceptualised as distinctive from everyday life (MacCannell 1976; Cohen 1979; Smith 1978), the post modern condition involves processes of de-differentiation that blur these distinctions (Uriely 2005). Consumers can experience tourism in many scenarios, 'there is much less tourism per se that occurs with specific and distinct kinds of time' (Urry 1990); tourism is everywhere and it blurs with everyday life. Lash and Urry (1994) indicated 'a process through which people become tourists most of the time, whether they are taking a vacation or conducting daily activities'. Later, in a discussion about gyms and spas and combining pleasure with the business trip, Ryan (2002) challenges the idea of tourism/leisure and work as contrasting experiences.

There are increasing similarities between behaviours that are 'home' and 'away" (Urry 2001: 7), tourism and other social practices are more similar, there is 'a supposed aestheticisation of contemporary life' (Lash and Urry 2002: 9). Society is now reinventing itself as in nomad times, to one based on focus rather than boundaries but the search for second homes shows that we are not entirely happy in this boundaryless world (Jackson 2002: 12); we continually strive to build home around us.

Kaltenborn (1998) states that 'the phenomenon of recreation homes is a facet of modernity which plays an important part in the creation of meaning in an increasingly complex world characterized by time-space compressions and identity dilemmas'. Second home ownership offers an opportunity for identification with place, it provides 'an antidote to feelings of placelessness' (Chaplin 2000: 142). The fact that, unlike many tourism products, the second home is uncommodified means that 'second homes are often an escape from home' (Chaplin 2000: 193).

Focussing specifically on the touristic, Müller (2002) maintains that 'Due to the high frequency of visits, the second home life becomes a more integrated part of everyday life than other forms of tourism and, thus, it blurs any clear distinction between tourism and everyday life'.

Continuing in this vein, and reinforcing the tourism/ leisure overlap, Williams and Kaltenborn (2000) state that in the second home 'leisure is not divorced from the rhythms of life as in the work home'.

Profiling the second home owner

Holiday home owners are a heterogeneous group (Mottiar and Quinn 2003: 123), and therefore it is difficult to ascribe them a particular profile. However, it can be concluded that in general they are higher income earners (Mottiar and Quinn 2003: 124) and that traditionally the greatest usage of second homes is by families headed by persons in the 45-65 age range, the pre-retirement life cycle stage, with higher education (Halseth and Rosenberg 1995; McHugh et al. 1995; Jansson and Müller 2004: 4). Jackson (2002) maintains that current interest in second homes in the US is highest among adults younger than thirty-five. Aronsson (2004: 84) found that vacation home residents in his Smögen study were '…mainly middle-aged and elderly people, highly educated and employed in the (private) service industry…. Members of the group have an urban career lifestyle'.

Godbey and Bevins (1987) maintain that interest in second homes should follow the life course, as does tourism in general. They pinpoint households that are well established in the labour and housing markets, and whose children are independent in terms of leisure pursuits, as having both the financial resources and the time to enjoy the 'family project' of the second home. In terms of the acquisition of the second home, the choice is described as a 'moderate' rather than a 'life changing' lifestyle choice (Quinn 2004). With regard to spatial distance the majority of second home owners live relatively close to their property, even in an international context (Müller 2004: 391).

There is little in the literature about what distinguishes second homeowners (from other tourists). Buller and Hoggart's (1994) British second home owners in France exhibited 'an aversion to compatriot fraternity' (p. 203). Later Chaplin (2000: 79) remarked about this group that they have the 'cultural capital' to appreciate the simple things in life; this would certainly be consistent with the desire for an uncommodified experience; for an 'unpackaged' experience.

The heterogeneous nature of second homeowner group is further emphasised when they discuss their future plans for the use of their second homes (Müller 2002: 443).

Motives

There has been relatively little empirical data gathered about the motives for second home ownership (Coppock 1977; Kaltenborn 1998). Certainly investment issues, stock market fears and the perception that owning a second home is an accessible practice play their part. The factors that facilitate second home ownership are 'having sufficient income to allocate money from the household budget to a non-essential item' and 'adequate time away from the place of employment to spend this income on leisure activities' (Ragatz 1977). Gallent and Tewdwr-Jones (2000: 17) are of the opinion that in order to understand 'the growth phenomenon of second home ownership, it is necessary to understand aspects of personal (actor) motivation alongside demand (or structural) considerations'. In a broader sense Kaltenborn (1998) writes of viewing home use as an aspect of modernity, as part of a larger process of societal evolution. He goes on to detail the multiple, and more personal reasons for second home ownership: identity management, contrast to modern everyday life and status.

A common motivation for the purchase of a second home is 'a certain notion of rurality' that originates from a traditional understanding of the urban-rural dichotomy (Müller 2004). That second homes represent emotional links to places of childhood or ancestry, that they provide continuity is also commented upon by Müller (2004: 390); these views concur with those voiced by Coppock (1977: 9).

Increased communication with family and 'the opportunity for intergenerational gathering' are often mentioned as reasons for investing in a second home (Jaakson 1986; Nordin 1993; Kaltenborn 1998). Jansson and Müller's (2003) Kvarken study revealed the three most important reasons for having a cottage as being: access to nature (31%), having a place just to relax (25%), and maintaining contacts with the native district, the landscape of childhood (10%).

In the context of the Europeanization of Britain and Ireland (King et al. 2000), it is easy to understand that a perception of 'desirability' of owning a second home abroad would be current. A study participant verbalises this particularly clearly 'Our main purpose of investing in France is for us and our children to become 'European' (Buller and Hoggart 2004: 205). Interestingly, Müller (1999) suggests second home ownership mirrors a form of internationalisation.

Jarlöv (1999) points out that very often in this second home, in this place of leisure and recreation people are working intensively; the second home as a project is taken on 'to have something to do'. This finding is echoed in the Kvarken study where relaxation is often seen to be the 'equivalent' of doing house maintenance (Jansson and Müller 2004). There is a desire to use the second home as a place to relax and gather strength to face 'ordinary' life; in fact life revolving around the recreation home can gradually become the ordinary life that provides the desired meaning, while the modern urban life represents the extraordinary existence (Kaltenborn 1998: 131); second home ownership can be said to constitute a turn to the local as a response to globalisation. The importance of 'individualisation', where individuals are decreasingly constrained by social structures and are able to focus on their individual desires, is 'a decisive criterion for the quality of life', and so is part of the second home ownership decision (Huber and O'Reilly 2004).

The second home has provided people with the ability to experience something that was no longer present in their 'normal' lives (Hall and Müller 2004; Buller and Hoggart 1994). This situation is posited as being a different kind of inversion to that which commercial tourism tries to create, 'where tourism places and nature represent a sort of constructed authenticity that is distinctly separated from the tourist's ordinary life' (Kaltenborn 1998). This finding is further supported by Chaplin's (2000) comment that the required behaviour in the second home is 'profoundly different from conventional experiences of holiday places' (p.108). Second home owners are looking for a different holiday experience (Chaplin 2000).

King et al (2004: 104) present a schematic model of the decision to acquire and utilise a transnational second home that subsequently becomes a retirement home. This model illustrates the complexity of the decision. Its main tenets are as follows:

• Individuals usually have very different expectations of properties used as second homes as compared to permanent homes

• At the time of migration, all principal homes are po-tential second homes

• At any one time a property has several potential uses

• There is simultaneous decision making; need to make decisions about two or more properties at the same time; financially related, changes in family and social networks.

Coppock's (1977) Schema of the Second Home Decision Process is somewhat similar.

In conclusion, while a large number of motives have been advanced, it seems that there is a broad consensus that escape from modernity, inversion of everyday life, and return to nature seem to underpin people's involvement in second home ownership (Quinn 2004).

CONCLUSION

This discussion of the literature on second home consumption leads to the conclusion that further study of the second home owner is topical and relevant. These consumers are tourists, they experience time away from their primary home, and they acknowledge 'difference' but enjoy the 'familiarity' of this other home. They may engage in work, which they term 'activity' or 'relaxation', this is often to do with the maintenance or development of the second home property.

In the context of the literature on postmodernism, second home ownership is evidence of de-differentiation; 'In late modern society...the distinction between work and leisure diminishes in time, space and content, recreation homes may gain greater importance.' (Kaltenborn 1998: 133). Further,

> ...it can be stated that 2nd home tourism is truly an expression of globalisation and today's highly mobile societies, and at the same time it is an expression of maintaining family roots and traditions. Hence, 2nd home tourism is not only about tourism, but goes beyond it. It represents the changing conditions of production and consumption...(Muller 2004: 395).

From another perspective, Juliet Schor in conversation with Holt (2005: 6) comments that 'There is a way in which the market is cannibalizing other parts of social life'; is it possible that second home consumption can help retard this?

Future study of second home owners, in both domestic and in foreign locations, will further develop understan-

ding of how these consumers integrate second home into life, their ability to transition among first, second and multiple homes, their inclination to flit through life. The focus then is very much on tourism as a practice rather than process.

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