

The Social Value of Second Homes in Rural Communities

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ABSTRACT *Analyses of the impacts of second home ownership in rural areas, around the world, regularly align with a “loss of community” thesis, linking second homes to a range of negative socio-economic consequences. This article looks again at the second home issue, developing a perspective that attributes a particular social value to temporary and seasonal rural residence. It proposes a framework for thinking about this phenomenon that brings together writings on the nature of place dwelling with ideas of social capital accumulation, and the potential interconnectors that temporary residents provide between the otherwise closed (or more limited) social networks of some rural communities and wider socio-economic and professional worlds. It argues that second homes may give communities a potential store of “bridging” social capital. Moreover, it proposes that second homes have a clear social value within rural community structures, and aims to open a research agenda and debate around the measurement and likely extent of this value.*

KEY WORDS: Second Homes, Rural Communities, Social Impact, Bridging Social Capital

1. Introduction

Considerations of the impacts of second home, vacation cottage or holiday/recreational home ownership and use in rural areas, around the world, regularly align with a “loss of community” thesis, with second homes linked to a range of negative socio-economic consequences. Second homes are more frequently viewed as a “curse” than a “blessing” (Coppock 1977) with the disruptions they bring to housing markets (pushing prices beyond the reach of “local” buyers and renters) and hence communities (through displacement) seeming to outweigh the benefits of investment in, and improvement of, the rural housing stock. In very broad terms, the “curse” of second homes is rooted in their distorting effect on house prices (Bollom 1978; Shucksmith 1981), particularly in areas where the economic base (in agriculture and services) delivers low wages for the permanently resident population. Their effect on housing markets means that they shoulder responsibility for consequent social changes and tensions (Gallent, Mace, and Tewdwr-Jones 2005,

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36–41): broadly, the gentrification of some villages, the knock-on effect for services (especially schools) and a presumed reduction in cohesiveness of communities, as social networks are weakened or lost completely. Second homes are often seen as part of a wider rural housing problem (Satsangi, Gallent, and Bevan 2010). But, the latest *reconsiderations* of this phenomenon have looked to reinterpret second home ownership, drawing out new meanings and identifying an array of alternative and unexpected impacts. Increasingly, the use of second homes is viewed as one component of an entirely new pattern of rural residence affecting many advanced industrial nations and as a local expression of global trends in “hyper-mobility” (Paris 2006, 2009) and a form of “dynamic heterolocalism” (Halfacree 2012) in whereby people identify with multiple places.

This paper also reconsiders the second home issue. Its purpose is to *begin* a re-evaluation of the social impacts of second homes. It does this by examining the potential of second home owners and users to introduce new relationships and connections to rural communities, reconfiguring and extending social networks rather than merely weakening them, which is often the assumed impact of temporary residents. It achieves this purpose not by presenting new empirical evidence (although it draws inferences from existing studies) but by proposing a framework for thinking about this phenomenon that connects conceptions of dwelling (Heidegger 1971; King 2004) – that is, how humans shape and domesticate the spaces around them, building identity through association – with ideas of social capital accumulation in rural communities, and the potential interconnectors that temporary residents provide between the otherwise closed (or more limited) social networks of *some* rural communities and the wider socio-economic and professional worlds which they inhabit during their working lives. The paper will ultimately contend that second homes give communities a potential store of “bridging” social capital (Putnam 2000), enabling them to “get ahead” (*ibid.*) on a social and, by implication, an economic front. It proposes that second homes have a clear social value within rural community structures, which has been overlooked, and aims to open a research agenda and debate around the measurement and likely extent of this value.

It achieves this aim in seven stages, presented here in seven sections. The first section examines the impetus behind the growth of second home ownership, connecting this growth to broader rural housing questions and the nature of rural areas (and why “rurality” gives rise to particular second home impacts). This is followed, in a second section, by a more detailed examination of the growth and expansion of second home ownership. The third section highlights the connection between temporary residence in the countryside and social change, drawing attention to the effect that the displacement of permanent residents is thought to have on the social networks (and relationships) that are vital to community well-being. In the fourth section, emergent perspectives on second homes point to a more reflective understanding of rural change and to new patterns of rural residence and “dwelling”. In the section that follows, these new patterns of residence are juxtaposed with thinking on the accumulation of social capital, and it is argued that critiques of second home ownership have hitherto been preoccupied with the absence of owners from communities, their limited daily engagement, and therefore their apparently limited propensity to generate social capital. But in this same section, it is also shown that social capital is the product not only of the strength of immediate relationships but also of the bridges that allow access to extra-local resources. In the sixth section, it is argued that some communities may benefit from the “bridging” social capital that

second home owners introduce to communities and in the last section, before conclusions are reached, the programme of empirical study needed to validate or refute claims made in the paper is set out.

2. Second Homes, Rurality and Rural Housing

Across North America and Western Europe, and elsewhere in the developed and developing world, significant numbers of households own two or more homes (Paris 2006). The first home is frequently located close to employment or some other source of income, whilst the other, or others, serve a leisure function. This division between first home located in a productive space, and other properties occupying consumption spaces, is only one possible model of second home ownership. Multiple property owners sometimes work in multiple locations, and the trend of married couples or civil partners living apart and working in separate places is well documented (Green, Hogarth, and Shackleton 1999; Hardill 2002). But in this paper, the intention is to focus exclusively on the simpler phenomenon of owning a second home for leisure purposes and, in particular, seeking a “retreat from urban living” (Gallent, Mace, and Tewdwr-Jones 2005, 18).

Coppock (1977) was amongst the first researchers to document the history and expansion of second home ownership in the developed world, pointing to the tendency of privileged social classes – in many countries – to acquire additional property for investment and leisure. It was also Coppock who drew attention to the social “democratisation” of this practice in the twentieth century, as families migrating to cities chose to retain their former rural homes: a phenomenon that was particularly important in Scandinavia and Southern Europe, creating generations of urban households who kept family homes in rural hinterlands. Britain was slower than its European neighbours to develop a second home market in the twentieth century owing to much earlier urbanisation and the loss through abandonment and decay of a significant amount of rural stock (Downing and Dower 1973). But after 1945, an increase in personal mobility throughout much of Europe – including Britain – as a result of road-building programmes and higher rates of car ownership increased accessibility to many more rural areas (Rogers 1977, 99). This, combined with a growth in disposable incomes, provided the *conditions* in which second home markets could expand. The *impetus* for this expansion came from the presentation of rural areas as “idealised” leisure spaces (see Crouch 1999; Gilliat 1973; Williams 1973) which seemed, in the context of an increasingly frenetic modern world, to meet the desperate need for “a bit of peace and quiet” (Massey 1993, 63).

Two important contextual issues arise from this brief overview of second home ownership and growth. First, rural areas (and “rurality”) provide a particular backdrop for this phenomenon and within these rural areas a range of debates have emerged relating, secondly, to the ways in which second homes influence local housing markets and therefore become part of a broader rural housing question.

In many countries, urban areas have proven attractive to second, third or fourth home investors. In some capital or core cities – London, New York, Paris and Rome, for example – this attraction is often expressed as international property investment, given impetus by a broad range of factors. But it is in rural areas where second homes have sparked significant debate and political reaction. In cities such as London, international investment tends to occur in neighbourhoods where the

rich compete against the rich for high-value property. Although this high-end market competition has a ripple effect on house prices, it tends to generate underlying concern rather than outrage, and is often considered an important mechanism to sustain (and also a measure of) the competitiveness of urban economies. But rural areas provide an entirely different context. Second home investment tends not to pit the rich against the rich, but brings urban wealth into conflict with relative rural poverty. As Rogers (1977, 99) observed, urban households are encouraged (by differential house prices) to “export” their wealth to rural areas where “[...] the essence of the housing problem”, according to Shucksmith (1981, 11) “[...] is that those who work there tend to receive low incomes, and are thus unable to compete with more affluent “adventitious” purchasers from elsewhere [i.e. from exporting areas] in a market where supply is restricted”.

The factors producing supply restriction are fundamental to “rurality”. “Functional” conceptions of rural spaces point to the inappropriateness of development and give legitimacy to particular pastoral and primary land uses such as farming and forestry. Conceptions centred on ideas of “political economy” tend to view the countryside as a space of low consumption and economic inactivity. And a dominant “social construction” of rural areas is of places linked to nature and of communities that should reject the pace of change associated with cities (Cloke, Mooney, and Marsden 2006, 20–21). What this all means is that in social and political discourse, development is viewed as less appropriate in rural areas. The desire to contain growth in urban areas, in many countries but particularly in the UK after 1945, means that rural areas cannot respond to the export of urban wealth in the same way that cities might react to property investment, i.e. through additional development. Housing scarcity in the face of adventitious demand, particularly in the most picturesque and accessible areas, combined with a dominant construction of “what the countryside is for” (which prioritizes “nature over worldliness” (Williams 1973, 46)) is found to be at heart of many rural housing tensions and conflicts (Satsangi, Gallent, and Bevan 2010, 238). It is this intellectual and physical space that is occupied by rural second homes and in which their particular development path and assumed social impacts are rooted.

3. The Growth and Extent of Second Home Ownership

The development path of the second home phenomenon has been traversed many times (see Coppock 1977; Gallent and Tewdwr-Jones 2000; Gallent, Mace, and Tewdwr-Jones 2005; Paris 2010), with authors offering a range of complementary explanations as to why an increasing number of urban households elect to become Shucksmith’s (1981) “adventitious purchasers” and invest in rural property (see discussion above). These range from the “rent gap” theories used to explain patterns of gentrification (Darling 2005) through the “exporting” of urban wealth (Rogers 1977), to ideas of the “rural idyll” (Bell 2006; Fielding 1982; Satsangi, Gallent, and Bevan 2010; Woods 2005) and the romantic pull that archetypal rural locations exert on tired and disillusioned urbanites (Champion 2000).

Full coverage cannot possibly be given to all the explanations for the rise and democratization of second home ownership in the twentieth century (for overviews, see Gallent, Mace, and Tewdwr-Jones 2005; Paris 2010), but the importance of multiple home ownership across the world is now explicit in available statistics. Comparable statistics are hard to collate and given differences in defining “second”

homes, often for the purpose of tax collection, it is necessary to seek data from individual countries and qualify overall figures with descriptions of exact meanings. Here, the overall pattern of ownership is more significant than the detail. Data from the European Union at the end of the 1990s – tracking the percentage of domestic households declaring the ownership of second homes – showed a “league table” with Sweden and Finland at the top (both with levels of ownership exceeding 20%), followed by Spain, Italy and Greece (all on 14%), and then the UK and Ireland trailing some way behind (both on 5%) (European Union 1998). These figures do not reveal anything about the concentration of foreign nationals owning second homes in another country and nor do they distinguish between second homes in rural areas or those held for investment or leisure in cities (see earlier discussion). Such patterns and distinctions are, again, only observable from closer scrutiny of national statistics. In the UK, for example, research from Savills Research (2011) shows that almost 500,000 of *all British households* own property overseas, including 71,000 who have a second home in the US or in Canada and another 38,000 with homes elsewhere outside Europe. In order to gain a view of the urban-rural split in ownership, reference again needs to be made to national data-sets. The last Survey of English Housing, for 2007–2008, revealed that 272,000 households residing *in England* also had a second home in England; 32,000 owned properties in Wales and Scotland and another 270,000 had second homes outside of Great Britain (DCLG 2008, Table S366). Of the second homes located in England, 26% were described by their owners as “holiday homes”, 10% as “retirement homes” (i.e. properties acquired for future retirement) and 49% as “long-term investments” (ibid., Table S355). These figures suggest that fewer than 100,000 homes are obvious “retreats” (if investment properties are discounted), and this figure aligns with analysis of Census records (that attempted to disentangle genuine second homes from long-term empty properties, awaiting sale or re-let) undertaken in the 2000s (Gallent, Mace, and Tewdwr-Jones 2005). Also discounted from the 272,000 total are properties used as a work-base by a family member “working away from the main home”, properties occupied by students “living away from home”, second homes produced through a “marital breakdown” and those retained for “other reasons” (ibid., Table S355). The alignment between Census-based accounts of second home ownership and the “holiday/retirement” figures suggests that these properties are, for the most part, located in rural locations. The 31,000 second homes in London (owned by English households, ibid., Table 3.22) are more likely to be held for investment or “other reasons”.

In the space of this article, it is not possible to disentangle rural from urban second homes across the globe, or give detailed treatment to different national situations. But much of the literature in this field suggests significant demand for second homes – and high levels of ownership – in many rural areas in many different countries. The phenomenon of acquiring and using rural property to escape the frenetic pace of urban living is not unique to Britain or to Europe (see Hall and Muller 2004 for a range of national overviews).

4. Second Homes and their Social Impact

Likewise, the problematising of second and multiple home ownership – in the context of constrained rural housing markets and against a wider backdrop of housing tensions and conflicts – is commonplace. There is a history of negative

analysis with second homes frequently viewed as contributing to a “loss of community”. In Britain, in the 1970s, Downing and Dower observed that:

While second homes consist merely of properties no longer wanted as first homes, they cause relatively few problems, but when they grow beyond this, political, social, economic and environmental problems arise. (ibid., 1973, 32)

These problems are said to flow from the “displacement” caused by second homes and the consequent transformation of communities assumed to be hitherto vibrant into “ghost towns” (Simms et al. 2002; see also Huijbens 2012, 15). Such displacement occurs for three principal reasons: rises in property prices are reflected in private rents, which become unaffordable to those on local wages; social networks become distended or broken because of the incursion of newcomers, with towns and villages becoming “alien” to existing residents; and the overall cost of living increases, as services come to reflect the tastes and incomes of new households (Lyons 1996). The economic disruptions that may underpin social reconfiguration (see Lee and Hodge 1984; Sumka 1979) lead to what many researchers, starting with Ruth Glass (1964), have described as “gentrification”. The process of gentrification is then amplified by the alienation identified by Lyons (1996), often manifest in the realignment of services with a new set of consumer preferences (Atkinson 2000; Newman and Wyly 2006).

But the unanswered question flowing from the above is whether a community that becomes host to a growing number of seasonal or periodic residents is necessarily “lost”, or whether it is in some way transformed, reinvented and potentially reinvigorated. Property prices may have moved; the configuration of social networks has shifted; and tastes have changed. But, should it automatically be assumed that the interactive processes which sustain a community have disappeared? Wellman, Boase, and Chen (2002) have argued that communities began to shift from “groups to networks” well before the advent of the internet, and that today’s communities are rarely bounded within space, but exist across a variety of networks of professional and social exchange. Seen from this perspective, the social transformation within rural areas, triggered in part by new patterns of residence, is not a “loss of community”, but an overlay of past dense “person-to-person” interactions with more complex, extended and open networks. Measured in terms of potential social exchange, communities may be re-discovered and potentially strengthened as a result of the social changes that migration, permanent and seasonal, brings. This unanswered question provided the trigger for this paper and it provides the anchor for the discussions that follow. However, it needs to be acknowledged that every community is different, being a product of an existing socio-economic make-up, and being shaped by the particular challenges it faces, the resources it possesses, the values it hosts and its relationships with nearby centres. As Edwards, Goodwin, and Woods (2003) observe, rural communities are not simple or homogenous cells, but often possess a complex internal and interactional dynamic. External forces coming into contact with this dynamic will interface with it in a variety of ways, producing a range of outcomes. An attempt is made to capture something of the interplay between second homes and community context in later discussion, but for the most part the sections that follow attempt to distil a general theory of second home impact from a range of literatures, and primarily from writings on social capital.

5. New forms of Consumption, Residence and Dwelling

As noted in the introduction, in a great deal of recent analysis, second homes are no longer painted immediately as the “scourge” of rural areas (Gallent, Mace, and Tewdwr-Jones 2005, 1). Rather, more reflective analyses view different forms of rural residence and consumption as symptomatic of wider socio-economic shifts. Halfacree (2012) for example places second homes, alongside other “consumers of rural space”, in a wider debate surrounding mobility and multiple place attachments, arguing that second homes and their consumption must be placed “firmly within the remit of this era of mobility’s existential condition” (ibid., 217). Paris (2009) also connects with debates around mobility and the individual choices that lead, inevitably, to new forms of consumption (ibid., 305). But whilst seeing second homes as another choice in a world brimming with choices – so no better or worse than other expressions of human behaviour – they are ultimately described as “objects of desired consumption”: not bad in themselves, but part of a dangerous pattern of “hyper-consumption” (Charles 2005, quoted in Paris 2009). Such analysis edges back towards the pejorative and contributes to a view that second homes, being merely objects of desired consumption, are inessential. This question of the essential or inessential nature of second homes is taken up by Muller (2011) who questions the “inferior status” of second homes relative to “first homes” (ibid., 140), again referring to the strength of place attachment and also Gallent’s (2007) contention that the owners of second homes engage in authentic “dwelling”. The ownership and use of second homes in this literature exemplifies an important change in how people live, their consumption habits and their flexible (i.e. seasonal and periodic) relationship with the places in which they seek to build identity, or a sense of belonging (see later discussion). Halfacree (2012) packages these ideas under the heading of “heterolocal identity”; a term which captures the idea of new residents trying to do more than merely consume rural space, but rather connect and interact with that space on a more fundamental level – domesticating it through the act of “dwelling” in the sense used by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, in one of his many phenomenological explorations into the essence of being (Heidegger 1971). For Heidegger, dwelling is concerned primarily with a domestication of space that expresses the “basic character of human being” and which can be accomplished in “manifold ways” (ibid., 148). It is impossible, in Heidegger’s existential phenomenological reading of dwelling to differentiate between primary and seasonal residence: people are merely finding alternate ways to dwell and to express their being.

This theoretical treatment of dwelling is at the root of more recent and current (re)interpretations of rural consumption, which diverge along two paths. The first accepts that different choices are being expressed through seasonal residence; and different ways of “accomplishing dwelling” are at work that cannot simply be dismissed as inferior. The second rejects this philosophical treatment as esoteric, as lacking real merit, and sees great danger in the absentee owners of second homes failing to interact (to “bond”), day in, day out, with neighbours. Therefore, second homes are maligned as a non-authentic form of place-dwelling (Gallent 2007). The authenticity of dwelling is gauged not in phenomenological terms but in terms of interactive contribution; and because seasonal residents *may be seen to interact less* than permanent residents, the way in which they dwell may be judged to contribute little or nothing to “community-building” produced through social interaction (Falk and Kilpatrick 2000). Strangely, there is also a phenomenological basis to this

pejorative view of second homes, building on the work of Heidegger once again, it might be suggested that second home owners have a tendency to engage in “private” (King 2004), rather than in more active forms of public or collective dwelling. Gallent (2007) argues that these latter forms (which are a corruption rather than an extension of Heidegger’s thinking) have, in debates concerning community development and mutualism, been viewed as superior to the seemingly closed and inert nature of private dwelling. Moreover, the policy imperative to build “sustainable communities” (through British planning and local government policies and programmes in the example cited by Gallent) has led to the construction of a “hierarchy of dwelling”, with clearly “active citizens” – who contribute in measurable ways to an agreed “stable” culture (King 2004, 23) – being endowed with greater legitimacy and morale rights. The flip-side of this is that notions of acceptable dwelling:

[...] may be used as a framework for control (to admit certain actions, to regulate experience of place) on the basis of which it is possible to implement punitive policy interventions. Those not engaging in acceptable dwelling are singled out and their lifestyles are brought into question. (Gallent 2007, 104)

The manner of dwelling and the exercise of choice, however, must be set against the damage to others that such choices may generate (Charles 2005). There are two central ideas to carry forward from this brief discussion. First, that *second home dwelling* can have great individual significance. And secondly, it can be considered to have collective (social) significance and value if the treatment of “interactive contribution” is widened to embrace a fuller spectrum of thinking on how social capital is generated. Embracing this wider view of social capital is the objective of the next two sections.

6. Patterns of Residence and Social Capital

It has been suggested that the alleged introversion of second home owners (or their long-term absence from host communities) may act to limit the scope of social interactions and therefore their contribution to community building (Gallent 2007; but see Huijbens 2012, for a counter-view). The extent to which a community is “built”, through this interaction (Falk and Kilpatrick 2000), may be expressed in terms of the accumulation of “social capital” or the “resource potential of social relationships” (Agnitsch, Flora, and Ryan 2006, 36). Chaskin et al. (2001) follow a standard line on this subject, arguing that innate *human capital* – the skills, knowledge and resources that all individuals possess – is transformed into social capital through social exchange and, consequently, *social capacity* is enhanced through the interaction of “organisational resources and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the wellbeing of that community” (ibid., 7). This understanding of capital accumulation through interaction is, in part, rooted in the work of Habermas (1984), who argued that actions designed to achieve personal goals are individualistic (ibid., 286) whereas “communicative action”, grounded in dialogue and a movement towards common understanding (and King’s [2004] stable culture), is a shared endeavour that flows from an increased capacity to understand problems and build

agreement around particular remedial or preventative actions. This thinking has spawned an array of literatures in sociology, planning and public policy around social cohesion and trust (Woolcock 1998), collaborative planning (Healey 1997) and deliberative action (Forester 1999) or governance (Fishkin 2011). The coming together of individuals, often from different walks of life, creates a stock of social capital which is only as strong as the “reciprocity and trust” that flows across social networks (Woolcock 1998). This implies that social capital is generated through close, and frequently direct, social exchange often between individuals who acknowledge their mutual interdependence (Beem 1999) and who wish to take actions for the wider good of a community (Putnam 2000) and, through social enterprise and entrepreneurialism, assume control over and responsibility for basic service provision in instances when neither the public sector or private enterprise is able to offer viable service solutions (Moseley 2000).

Those day in, day out interactions noted in the previous section are crucial and indeed, this understanding of social capital would suggest that person-to-person contact – or the “bonding” of near neighbours – is *the* process by which communities are sustained and their “capital” is enhanced. Those residents of a community who are able, therefore, to engage in daily contact have the greatest potential to help generate social capital, and those who are absent, the least. But whilst Putnam (2000), drawing on analyses from across the USA, argues that it is everyday “bonding” between friends and neighbours that generates trust and reciprocity, establishing solidarity *within a community* (ibid., 22), it is through “bridging” (or extra-local ties) that social, professional and political divides are crossed and communities are able to expand their stock of social capital. This is because how much a “closed” community can achieve is limited by the extent of local skills and knowledge (see also Agnitsch, Flora, and Ryan 2006). Social capital is accumulated slowly and incrementally by this bonding of near neighbours (the *exclusive* accumulation of bonding capital, in communities with little external connectivity, may lead to the creation of cliques or closed networks that become prejudiced against outside interests and ideas: ibid., 40), but big gains come from connecting or “bridging” to external resources and networks, or by introducing communities to different groups and different skill and knowledge pools. According to Putnam, bonding is the means by which communities “get by”, but the sociological “WD-40” (2000, 23) provided by bridging extends the reach of networks and allows them to “get ahead”.

Social network theory sits behind much of this thinking. The sociometry used to depict communities as networks frequently shows clusters of individuals isolated from one another, with no obvious means of communication. The gaps between clusters, or the missing connector that would otherwise link individuals, has been described as a “structural hole” (Burt 1992). It is possible that clusters will possess different, and potentially complementary, capacities and that a coming together of these clusters would be mutually beneficial, or perhaps just helpful to one of the parties (be it a community or some other “group”), which hitherto lacked a particular resource or knowledge. An interconnector able to form a “bridge” between clusters, and introduce new capabilities would be very important in the accumulation of social capital. Once this interconnector reveals itself, it is likely to become a focal point within a broadening network by virtue of its capacity to “span the hole” (ibid.) or, from the perspective of communities, simply bring something new to community development.

Granovetter (1973) has suggested that interconnectors may take the form of “weak ties” that only become known over time. They are incidental to everyday interaction and bond only weakly with principal network actors (within, for example, a place community), but occupy powerful positions within an extendable social network, being located between groups. They have the potential to become powerful “bridges” (see Agnitsch, Flora, and Ryan 2006, 39), acting as “autonomous” social ties and therefore distinct from the “embedded” social capital that is achieved through bonding (Woolcock 1998, 164). Following this line of thinking, it is proposed here that second home owners might act as autonomous bridges, though it is less obvious that they are weak or hitherto silent ties. New rural residents, permanent or seasonal, are often vociferous in wanting to shape their environments, regularly seeking to protect personal interest (Smith and Krannich 2000). They may even have a “transformative” agenda (see below) that is misaligned with broader community interests and causes friction. But, this is not necessarily the case and the contention offered now is that second homes provide a potential source of “bridging social capital”.

7. Bridging Social Capital and Shaping Rural Communities

Rural communities around the world have changed significantly over the last 50 years. This change has been driven by economic restructuring and the general movement away from agricultural production to economies centred either on the service sector or urban-based manufacturing. It is impossible to capture the full range of national patterns in a single sentence, but in many countries rural areas have become service, residential, environmental or leisure hinterlands to nearby towns and cities. As Halfacree (2012) and others have noted, there is a heightened tendency to “consume” rural space and accomplish rural dwelling in a variety of ways. Rural communities in England, for example, were subject to dramatic socio-economic shifts during the twentieth century, with Pahl (1970) using village case studies in Hertfordshire (to the north of London) to illustrate the new social composition of rural areas, and Shucksmith (1990) drawing attention to the lengthening list of “domestic property classes” being attracted to small village locations; including wealthier retired and commuter households, investment buyers and people looking for an ideal countryside retreat. These have become the basic residential “consumers of rural space”, who frequently exhibit Halfacree’s “heterolocal” identity and whose mode of dwelling appears to blur the boundaries between first and second home (Muller 2011). It is noteworthy that there are key spatial tendencies associated with different types of consumer. Older retiring households may select locations with a broader array of services and transport connections. Commuters also prioritize connectivity, via road and rail, for obvious reasons. This may mean that urban hinterlands become the key recipient areas for permanent migrants. Seasonal migrants on the other hand do not require the same level of connectivity, and like lifestyle downshifters (those making a conscious decision to move outside areas of urban influence), they may be attracted to more remote locations that are nonetheless accessible for periodic holidays. What this means is that patterns of migration vary in different rural locations, and villages with high numbers of commuting households may have relatively few second home owners and vice versa. This pattern is reinforced by the tendency of second home buyers to gravitate

to the areas of lower property prices, with prices influenced by issues of spatial connectivity and therefore market interest.

All of these “newcomers” (and not only second home owners) have at least the potential to retain strong external links and act as bridges between different social and professional worlds. This point is recognized by Rye (2011, 265):

The presence of “urbanites” in the communities, who invest not only money but also their identities, loyalties and spare time in the hosting region, offers important resources that may be activated by the local population. The urbanites often provide access to important social networks that extend outside the municipality, perform roles as advocates and ambassadors for the locality in their urban environments, and introduce new knowledge and practices in the rural community.

Because of the spatial tendencies noted above, in some areas these urbanites are predominantly permanent migrants and elsewhere they are more likely to be second home owners and users. In a recent study of second home owners in North Iceland (which can certainly be considered remoter rural), Huijbens (2012, 5) posits that “recurrent visitors” to a region or a village have an ability to “sustain long lasting and stable network relations”, which translates into a potential to “sustain the social fabric of a community”. Although Huijbens also employs a social capital perspective on understanding the social value of second homes, the role of “bridged” links to external resources is implied but not brought out explicitly. In his study of the community of Fjallabyggð, a distinction is made between individuals and families returning to a village where they have obvious family roots (labelled “homesick locals”) and those (the “lifestyle” locals) buying homes for other reasons (*ibid.*, 12). Huijbens found that the homesick locals, or community expats, tended to expend greatest effort on building social networks in the city and chose to become “socially inactive” in the villages, displaying “nostalgic sentiment” and lamenting (but doing very little about) the pace of social change. Lifestyle locals, on the other hand, had an “urge to use their knowledge and skills to the benefit of their [adopted] “hometown” (*ibid.*, 15), developing “visions” to be pursued through active involvement in social networks and by demanding and consuming a variety of “cultural activities and local products” (*ibid.*, 16). The inactive lifestyles – or perhaps the “private dwelling” – of Huijbens’ “homesick locals” was contrasted with the “creative” agendas of those without the bonds of family and friends, subsequently interpreted by the author as a desire to “prove their worth in society” and establish “themselves as local” in order to feel that they belong (see below). Overall, this latter group of second home owners engaged in the “active constitution of relations”. And although the extent to which they connected to extra-local resources remained untested, the potential for such connectivity (and the motivation for it, given the desire to deliver local projects and an economic turnaround) would seem clear.

In another study of community-based planning and activism in southern England (a more accessible area, within the spatial influence of London), Gallent and Robinson (2012, 100) observed that some active community groups, because of a dominance of older and retired members, have “[...] stunted social networks and have a more limited interest in what is going on beyond the confines of [their] community”. There was frequently an expectation within groups that community

benefits might accrue from having a broader membership and a contingent of working people able to key into professional networks. There was an acknowledged “introversion” in some rural communities and an acceptance of the probable benefits of acquiring additional “bridging social capital”. In the same study, it was recognized by focus group respondents that working households (who were invariably commuting households, often with jobs in London) had potentially useful social and professional contacts that could strengthen a community’s capacity to deal with particular challenges, or threats. In one instance, a community had faced the prospect of significant housing growth (that would have doubled its size and population) through a single development project of more than 5000 new homes. There was widespread opposition to the project. The presence of “prize-winning architects” in the village (*ibid.*, 92) – who commuted to their practices in London – and also retired editors of “broadsheet” newspapers enabled the community council to embark on a successful technical and PR campaign against the development proposal, which was eventually withdrawn.

In that particular case, there was no specific mention of temporary residents becoming involved in the community-based campaign, but the *capacity* to campaign – connecting to and making “use of extra-local resources” (Rye 2011, 265) – was enhanced by the external connections on which the community could draw. Commuting households, which connected the social world of a rural Kentish community to different professional worlds in London, ultimately provided a store of bridging social capital. Hence, this particular experience in southern England (in a more accessible rural area) at least hints at the general connectivity that Rye’s “urbanites” may introduce and also at the relative impacts of different kinds of newcomer. Commuters seemed, in this instance, to have the greatest impact, finding the time (it appears) to get involved in community affairs (at least at key moments) and connect to urban resources. Those who had retired to the community found the time to become active in local governance but, by their own admission, had lost some of the professional links which had been built during their working lives. Those newcomers who retained connections and utilised them were motivated by personal and political interest, and by conservative and protectionist values, though these seemed to align with the ideals of the wider community, at least in this instance.

However, it is not always the case that newcomers simply confirm and bolster the principled position of a host population. Rather, people often enter communities with different sets of values (that may be tangential to the “stable” culture that has built up over time, through everyday social exchange) and sometimes a transformative agenda. New residents seek to “domesticate” space in their own terms (Heidegger 1971), motivated by the need to acquire a sense of belonging (Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst 2005). They may introduce ideas and values that conflict with the cultural norms that have already been agreed upon by existing residents. That newcomers to rural communities arrive with a preconception of how the countryside should be – grounded in a deep romanticism that is reinforced by media depiction – is a recurring theme in rural studies (Bell 2006). The search for the “rural idyll” and the consequent desire to protect and reinforce it once it is found accounts for at least a proportion of counter-urbanisation in many countries and also in approaches to rural resource and settlement planning which are biased towards conservation and rural protection (Satsangi, Gallent, and Bevan 2010). The [attempted and completed] transformations that follow the conclusion of this search may also be a source of significant conflict in some rural areas, and in instances where social

change triggers conflict the advantages that migration (permanent or seasonal) brings to communities may well be doubted.

The French sociologist Bourdieu (2005) provides a more conceptual perspective on how introduced values become an engine of change in many different social spheres. Rejecting the view that individuals simply adapt to extraneous conditions, Bourdieu posits that individuals employ “capital” and “habitus” (an amalgam of values, beliefs and dispositions reflected in acquired patterns of taste, behaviour and thought) to express and introduce cultural preferences to different “fields”. These fields take the form of any arena in which individuals seek to gain an advantage or create desired conditions, for example, a work or a domestic environment. Those with a great resource of capital possess a greater capacity to *transform* a field and to bring about a realignment of physical conditions with their own “habitus”, whilst those with less are more likely to be *subject* to change (Robbins 1991, 100).

Clearly, these ideas offer a perspective on the interaction between different “domestic property classes” (Shucksmith 1990) – distinguished in terms of wealth – within rural space. More specifically, it hints at the unwelcome transformations that migration – including the incursion of second home buyers – may bring. Introduced wealth, or capital, may be able to mount a challenge (where there are significant contrasts in patterns of taste, behaviour and thought) to the hitherto stable culture. This is because human agents seek to define a place for themselves in the world through aggressive reordering; every field is subject to the forces of capital and habitus and “[...] is inhabited by tensions and contradictions that are at the origin of conflicts” and it is the ensuing “struggles or competitions which generate change” (Bourdieu 2005, 47). In this way, fields shape and are shaped by human interactions, and therefore places are remade through interaction or struggle. Rural areas are constructed through this interaction, and in some instances, are largely the product of hitherto “external” capital and habitus; *reproduction* is used to create *belonging* in a sense also employed by Heidegger (1971) that newcomers have made a “place for themselves in the world”.

In the study conducted in southern England, of commuting households bridging to external contacts and strengthening a community’s effective opposition to a certain form of change, there appeared to be a shared “habitus”: the community – or at least the dominant voices in the community – were seeking to protect a particular status quo. In that instance, new “consumers of rural space” came together with established residents under a common banner and those able to “bridge” to broader skill and knowledge sets were able to reinforce an agreed view of which changes the community should accept, and which it should reject. Second home owners have the clear potential to contribute to this type of mobilization, assuming that their personal interests align with a community’s particular attitude towards development or towards service requirements; conservative second home owners in conservative communities, which are resistant to change, may introduce valued contacts and generally reinforce the attitudes of other residents.

But on the other hand, where temporary residents (or other new arrivals) resist change in instances where change is wanted – in the form of housing growth, investment in jobs and so on – their value to the community may be doubted. However, it is generally the case that second home buyers are attracted to (remoter or slightly less accessible) areas in which significant change is unlikely and where development proposals are liable to prove controversial. Across Europe, for example, many second home investors (apart from those attracted to the coastal

chalet developments of Portugal, southern Spain and Italy) seek seclusion, the picturesque or the archetypal rural setting. They avoid areas of impending change, where the “new” – in the form of development – is likely to encroach on the rural idyll. It is those types of area where second home owners have the potential to become key bridges to extra local resources.

More generally, second home owners are a part of the typical rural community that emerged, in many areas, in the latter part of the twentieth century. They are firmly a part of the “existential condition” that characterizes modern rural space and like other consumers of that space they have a propensity to contribute to the interactive generation of social capital, but through bridging rather than through everyday social exchange.

8. Towards a Research Agenda

Many prior analyses of the socio-economic contribution of second homes to rural communities have focused on the direct and indirect income they generate for local economies, calculating income generated during the buying and selling of properties (Jenkin 1985); quantifying the confidence that second homes bring to housing markets through increase in property values (Hoggart, Buller, and Black 1995); valuing general stock improvement (and the economic benefits to local contractors); and measuring tourism expenditure, property tax contributions and increased spending on local services (Gallent, Mace, and Tewdwr-Jones 2005, 51–61). These contributions are balanced against the social costs of displacement and gentrification: the “damage to others”. The general conclusion reached, in all but the most recent and revisionist analyses, is that second homes represent “conspicuous consumption” (Paris 2010) and are “inessential” (Muller 2011) when set against other social costs.

The socio-economic contribution of other groups is seldom tallied up in this way. Rather, it is suggested that permanent residents “dwell” in a public and collective (i.e. “authentic”) sense and that their full-time residency implies a greater contribution to the interactive process of community building through the forming of critical relationships. But application of Putnam’s distinction between bonding and bridging social capital (a distinction that has been made by numerous researchers) points to a research agenda centred on *six* critical issues:

- (1) the role of various new consumers of rural space (including retiring households and other newly arrived urbanites) in accelerating the accumulation of social capital through the creation of network linkages, or bridges, to extra-local resources;
- (2) the extent to which second home owners, in particular, are *instrumental* in building social capital within rural communities through a tendency to act as incidental bridges to these same or similar extra-local resources;
- (3) the specific kinds of bridges that are built (i.e. to professional worlds) and how multiple dwelling, implying connectivity to multiple networks, helps communities to “get ahead”;
- (4) the extent to which these bridges are “autonomous” (Woolcock 1998) and second home owners are therefore disconnected from immediate neighbours and the extent to which permanent migrants to rural areas become more embedded in communities, providing bridges with stronger foundations

- within host communities. This might imply that seasonal residents *act on* issues from outside the place community as opposed to helping drive agendas from within. The former may involve lobbying on planning issues, for instance, by simply registering opposition to development without recourse to, or discussion with, permanent residents (within community fora or governance structures);
- (5) whether the particular interplay between the prevailing “stable culture” and the “habitus” introduced with second home owners (in different places) means that those forming “bridges” display particular characteristics; in some instances, this might mean conservative incomers reinforcing the agendas of conservative communities, or clashing with communities seeking an active programme of residential and economic development. Elsewhere, second home buyers may reject conservatism and become embedded in pro-growth community agendas. This might happen in instances (and in countries and regions) where family connection (to the host community) creates greater alignment with a prevailing culture; and finally
 - (6) the transformative potential of this mechanism, whether socio-political agendas are hijacked by seasonal residents because the bridges created are cynical ones, allowing newcomers (of all types) to lead agendas (from the perspective of decision-takers), and reshape places in a way that might accelerate the displacement of economically marginalised groups. This links back to local interplay, but the more fundamental question here is whether newcomers continue to struggle against existing local cultures, or whether they simply reaffirm the “existential condition” of modern rural space, sharing many of the preferences expressed by other consumers of this space.

9. Conclusions

This paper has developed a perspective on second homes which links this phenomenon to community development. It has been argued that second homes in rural areas have a potential social value, increasing the connectivity of communities to new skills and knowledge, and thereby raising their store of social capital. All consumers of rural space are, by definition, external to their host communities. Whether they are commuting or retiring households, or whether they are investors in property or second home owners, they have stepped outside their productive space, but they are likely to have retained connection to key social and professional networks. They are able to use this *connectivity* (alongside their capital) to domesticate the spaces of their dwelling. Whether this is viewed positively or negatively in host communities will depend on the alignment between existing and introduced tastes, behaviours and thoughts. Some clues as to their validity of these ideas are found in a broad literature on bridging social capital and in the experiences of modern rural communities in mobilizing against external threats or engaging in effective community self-help. Arguably, second homes (and the alternative pattern of hetero-local identity they represent) are part of a broader social pluralisation. The disquiet they provoke in some rural communities signals a continuing struggle between traditional ideas of citizenship (and dwelling) and a global diffusion of contrasting cultures and identities (Misztal 1996). This struggle extends into an important

debate on the production and reproduction of community in rural areas and the capacity of those communities to deal with core socio-economic challenges. This paper has tried to draw attention to this debate and offer another alternative perspective on second homes that warrants further research.

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