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Motives for Russian Second Home Ownership in Finland

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ABSTRACT Russian second home ownership has been a growing trend in Finland during the last two decades. Russian second homes or dachas comprise the absolute majority among foreign purchases, which is about 70% of the total annual foreign real-estate business in Finland. The phenomenon of Russian second home ownership in Finland has not been the focus of much academic attention. This paper is the first attempt to define the reasons that Russians have for their choice of country for a second home location and what kind of motives are behind this decision. The primary general information about the case has been collected through 25 interviews with Russian second home owners in the Savonlinna region, province of South Savo, eastern Finland. The results show that second home demand and location are strongly intertwined in the motives of Russians. Among the main motives for second home ownership and its location in Finland are: the strongly positive image of Finland, untouched and clean nature, similar climatic conditions, lake landscape with personal access to the lakeshore, and price rates for second homes. Other motives, such as relaxation and activities, are playing a secondary role.

KEY WORDS: dacha, second homes, motives, Russians, Finland

Introduction

Second homes are an essential part of the Nordic lifestyle and leisure culture. This growing type of recreation embraces about half of the Nordic population (Müller, 2007). Nordic second homes traditionally represent simple ways of living: modest dwellings that are small in size, located in natural areas dominated by nature-based activities (Müller, 1999; Pitkänen, 2008; Vittersø, 2007).

One of the common features of Nordic second homes is their internationalization as a consequence of the European integration process. Norway, Sweden, and Finland have become mutually attractive second home markets, as well as for their closest European Union (EU) member states, e.g. Germany (Müller, 2007). Denmark is an exception due to restrictions on any foreign property ownership.
Finland also had restrictions on foreign property ownership after independence in 1917 until accession to the European Economic Area and the EU in the mid-1990s. This opened the property market to other member states. The property market was finally opened to all foreigners in 2000. Since then the share of foreign ownership in the Finnish property market has been growing steadily. The biggest interest is coming from Russians who have almost quadrupled foreign real-estate purchases in Finland within four years (2005–2009) (Pitkänen, 2011). The peak of purchases was registered in 2008, when Russians bought 780 properties, while the average number is about 400 properties per year. Second home purchases made by Russians represent about 70% of the total annual foreign purchases (reaching up to 83% in 2008). The total amount of Russian purchases in Finland is 3254 properties during 2000–2011 (National Land Survey of Finland; see Figure 1). Nationwide the phenomenon is still quite marginal – foreign purchases comprise about 1% of the total annual Finnish real-estate market. Thus, Russian second home ownership is rather insignificant in reality (Koivisto, 2011). However, fears and concerns related to Russian second home ownership have been receiving significant media coverage that is often dominated by aggressive and negative perceptions (Pitkänen, 2011).

Similar to the Nordic tradition, dacha in Russia (which is the Russian word for a second home or cottage) have been “deeply embedded in cultural memory and social practice” (Lovell, 2003, p. 6). A dacha is a house with a plot of land in a rural area, the owner of which is a permanent urban resident, but spends from a week to a year in a rural area (Nefedova, 2012).

A dacha dates back to the second half of the eighteenth century. For most of its history, the dacha—a small-sized garden plot located nearby large urban centers—served for recreation and supplementary food cultivation. As the state faced food supply crises in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet periods, citizens were forced to survive on their own by growing their own produce—dachas developed into a resource for this food production (Lovell, 2003). The collapse of the Soviet regime was accompanied by increasing inequality, financial instability, a large unofficial sector, and a corrupt and criminalized economic system that further forced self-reliance and undermined public trust in state institutions (Glinkina, Grigoriev, & Yakobidze, 2001; Shleifer & Treisman, 2004). Dacha ownership peaked in 1996 with a steady decline of traditional dachas and gradual increase in luxury second homes (Southworth, 2006; Struyk & Angelici, 1996). Today about half of all city dwellers in Russia have a dacha. According to the official, but incomplete statistics, this includes 17 million families (Nefedova, 2012). Dachas have crossed national borders nowadays, they can be found in many European countries, such as Spain, Bulgaría, Cyprus, Italy, and Montenegro (World Property Invest, 2012). According to different estimations, foreign investments in real estate will increase, forced by the changing political, economic, and social conditions in Russia (Berezina, 2012; Fomchenkov, 2012). Today’s dacha owners are a diverse group of middle- and upper class urbanites (Lovell, 2003; Southworth, 2006).

Russian second home ownership in Finland is a recent phenomenon, which previously has not received much academic attention. Russian cottagers have been portrayed as a distinctive and growing group of foreign tourists (Kotilainen, Piipponen, & Pitkänen, 2010) and as a subject of the Finnish public debate on foreign second home ownership (Pitkänen, 2011).
The study of trans-border second home ownership has been only the subject of limited academic study (Hall & Müller, 2004; Müller, 2011). Existing studies cover few regions, even though the phenomenon of trans-border ownership has developed unevenly in different parts of the world, as some regions are more attractive than others (Hall, 2006; Paris, 2011; Pitkänen, 2011; Woods, 2011). Thus, an important task is to widen the scope of academic attention to trans-border second home destinations, especially with respect to the reasons for selecting one potential destination over another.

This paper discusses Russian second home ownership in Finland, a subject that has substantial social resonance (Pitkänen, 2011), but has been relatively academically neglected. The main question of this paper therefore is: Why do Russians choose Finland as a place for second homes and what kinds of motives are behind their decisions? The paper consists of six sections: introduction; the theoretical overview on motives for second home ownership and for site selection; a description of the study area, participants, and methods of data collection and analysis; an analysis of Russians’ motives for second home ownership in Finland; discussion; and conclusions.

Theoretical Background

Motives

Motives for second home ownership can be divided broadly into two major groups: motives for having a cottage and the driving factors for a destination choice. The second group of motives represents particular interests in terms of trans-border second home ownership. Motives for second home purchase include inversion, relaxation, nature, activities, status, and personal motives (Hall & Müller, 2004; Jaakson, 1986).

Inversion is considered to be a major force for second home tourism. A summer cottage creates a contrast to “normal life” due to its location and a different countryside lifestyle (Müller, 1999). Countryside location in the process of second home ownership can also symbolize a simple rural lifestyle and a desire to step “back to nature” (Hall & Müller, 2004, p. 12). Change of lifestyle can also mean a desire to “escape” from a busy urban environment and enjoy experiences that are no longer available in everyday normal life. This is what Kaltenborn (1998, p. 124) defined as a “vacation” from modernity. Lifestyle changing is interrelated with relaxation, which presumes leisure rather than work at a cottage. Second homes provide good opportunities for relaxation, since a familiar place does not require familiarization or adaptation to it (Müller, 1999).

A cottage is an object of activities or it can provoke different kinds of activities due to its countryside location. As an object of activities a cottage undergoes maintenance and renovation activities, which creates “an enjoyable” contrast to life back in the city (Müller, 1999). A cottage can play a bigger role than simply a summer house: it can symbolize the search for personal identity, family connections, or important plans related to it (Hall & Müller, 2004; Jaakson, 1986). A classic example of personal motives is British people seeking a “lost countryside in France”, something that is not available anymore in their own country (Hoggart & Buller, 1995).

In some cases, a summer cottage can indicate social status, especially if the property is located in an amenity-rich location or abroad (Hall, 2006; Hall & Müller, 2004; Jaakson, 1986). However, in most cases second homes symbolize simple and traditional lifestyles, even though cottage owners are representatives of the middle and upper classes (Müller, 2002). Motives for second home ownership are few in number and do not change over time (Hall & Müller, 2004). Different tourists can be motivated by different needs. Thus cottage purchase represents a complex interplay of various motives.
Motives for second home ownership can help to explain the decision to make a purchase but do not provide full understanding of the choice for cottage location. Second home site selection is significantly affected by space and time, the attractiveness of the area, and the price level of the real estate (Hall, 2011; Hall & Müller, 2004; Jaakson, 1986; Kauppila, 2010). Increasing distance decreases tourists’ demands, as they seek a destination that requires the least input of time and money (Müller, 2006).

The distance between permanent residences and second homes determines the frequency of visits and length of stay. Accordingly, second homes are divided into three zones: day-trip, weekend, and vacation homes (Hall & Müller, 2004; Kauppila, 2010). The cumulative theoretical zone model for Finland, based on the analysis of various models for distance between primary and second homes, is presented in Kauppila (2010). The day-trip zone lies within a distance of 80–100 km, which is a 60–75-minute trip. The weekend zone starts from 100 km with the upper distance border varying between 250 and 400 km. This represents a three- to five-hour trip. The vacation zone overlaps with the weekend zone in the area between 250 and 400 km and over. The critical point for use of second homes is 200 km. After that point, the occupation of second homes decreases with a total loss of interest in second homes when the distance exceeds the upper limits of the weekend zone (Kauppila, 2010). Thus, weekend homes are visited frequently and usually for a short period, while vacation homes are visited occasionally and for longer periods. Transport availability can shorten the travel time to a remote vacation home. However, only those who have a higher income have greater mobility. Thus, it is considered that long-distance second home ownership is still an exception even in an international context (Hall & Müller, 2004; Kauppila, 2010). Cottage owners are usually representatives of middle and upper classes (Müller, 1999).

In addition to distance, the image of the destination plays an important role in the process of site selection (Müller, 1999, 2006). The relative attractiveness or very positive image of a destination determines the frequency of visits, human longing for places, and planned and purposeful journeys. After visiting the area one may desire forming a permanent connection with the place through purchasing some kind of accommodation there (Müller, 1999).

Along with landscape attractiveness, the environment plays an important role. Village life and a cleaner environment in comparison to an urban center are among the reasons to migrate from the city (Müller, 1999). Furthermore, rural areas attract potential owners with their price rates. Housing prices in the countryside are usually much lower than in urban regions (Hall, 2011; Norris & Winston, 2010).

Among other factors influencing the site of a second home can be mentioned land availability and real-estate agents’ offers (Hall & Müller, 2004; Müller, 2006). The role of agents is significant especially in terms of foreign second home ownership, as it directs cottagers to certain destinations where they have available land or ready-built second homes. Land availability is also an important factor, since land is not always available for foreign purchase (as it once was in Finland); while available plots should not fall under certain land categories.
Foreign Location

There are a number of examples of second home ownership by national groups in neighboring countries, for example, the British in France, Germans in Scandinavia and Hungary, Norwegians in Sweden, Austrians and Italians in Slovenia, Americans in Mexico, and Singaporeans in Malaysia (Csordás, 1999; Hoggart & Buller, 1995; Lampič & Mrak, 2012; Müller, 2011; Paris, 2011; Woods, 2011). The rapid growth of second homes abroad is the result of the increasing affordability of foreign property markets through the loosening of restrictions on foreign ownership and transport accessibility (Müller, 2006; Paris, 2011; Woods, 2011). The foreign location of a second home is associated with increased risk as cottage owners encounter foreign culture, language, and legislation. Furthermore, the state border may require additional procedures for cottage visits. For example, Russians need a visa to visit Finland. Due to the time–distance factor for a cottage location transnational, second homes tend to be present in the border regions of two neighboring countries. Thus, the location of a second home abroad might still be inside the weekend or vacation zones. However, the possibility to purchase a cottage in an amenity-rich area in another country might in itself be more significant than its foreign location (Müller, 1999).

An important factor in explaining reasons for transnational ownership is an understanding of the cultural background of second home owners. In some cases it is not possible to afford purchasing a cottage in one’s home country. An absence of plots with a desirable location (such as a lakeshore or a mountain area) in the home country and significant differences in housing prices can lure cottage buyers to the closest neighboring state (Müller, 2006).

Methodology

The data were collected through 25 thematic in-depth interviews with 35 Russian second home owners during the summer 2010. The case study was carried out in the Savonlinna region in the province of South Savo due to its popularity among Russian buyers (see Figures 1 and 2). According to the National Land Survey of Finland, Russians purchased 320 properties out of the total 349 foreign purchases in the area in 2007–2010 (see Figure 2).

Information on foreign second home owners for three years (2007–2010) from the region was provided by the Finnish National Land Survey. According to this information, 156 cottages were visited, resulting in seven interviews. At those cottages with absent owners, letters with a request for an interview were left behind, resulting in nine interviews. Four more respondents were reached by email with the help of a cottage rental agency. Two interviews were arranged through personal contacts and three more through a real-estate agency.

Interviews were conducted in second homes (n = 13), by phone (n = 3), in the respondents’ home town (n = 2), by email (n = 2), and on university premises (n = 5). Twenty male and 13 female respondents were interviewed. The majority of the couples (n = 11) are between 40 and 49 years old, nine couples are over 50, and five are below 39. Most of the respondents have families with children or grandchildren (n = 16), two couples are already pensioners. The average duration of ownership is five years. The majority of
the respondents are from St. Petersburg ($n = 15$) and Moscow ($n = 8$) and one family is from Petrozavodsk. The distance from the cottagers’ primary residence to the second home stretches from 270 km for cottagers coming from St. Petersburg and 1200 km for Muscovites; the traveling time varies between 4 and 18 hours. The occupations of the respondents are very diverse, including those in construction, law, accountancy, business, tourism, and others. The names of the respondents have been changed in the paper so as to provide anonymity.

Interviews were conducted in Russian and each face-to-face interview was recorded. Specific question on identifying motives included: Why did you buy a cottage in Finland?; Why in this specific area?; Did you consider some other countries or Russia?; What did you know about Finland before buying the cottage?; What kind of image of Finland did you have?; How has this image changed?; and What do you normally do at the cottage?

Interviews have been analyzed thematically (see e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis began when transcribing the data and similarities and particularities in answers were marked. Then the data have been approached with theory-driven themes that mirrored basic motives for second home ownership. Other data that have not fitted directly with a theme have been sorted into subthemes. Thus, themes have been purposefully created, while subthemes have emerged independently from any preset theory theme. Table 1 gives theory and data-driven themes from the thematic analysis of interviews with Russian second home owners.
In addition to the interviews with Russian second home owners, seven interviews were conducted with real-estate agents (summer 2010). These agencies are working exclusively with Russian clients and run by Russian migrants or their descendants. Interviews with agents did not undergo thematic analysis, but have been used as expert overviews of the phenomenon.

Results

A decision to purchase a second home and a purchase in a particular location cannot really be separated. Some decide to have a second home and choose the location later, others want to have a second home only in a certain area (Müller, 1999). According to the respondents, some of the motives of second home purchase can be fulfilled only in Finland. Thus, second home demand and location are strongly intertwined in the motives of Russians. This is vividly shown in the following analysis of motives.

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I inversion
Seeking difference is one of the leading motives for property acquisition abroad. Finland as a rural country provides a significant contrast for Russians from densely populated Russian megalopolises. St. Petersburg, for example, has a population matching that of Finland. This significantly differentiates the rhythms of life in Finland and in Russia. Consequently, Finland has less traffic on the roads, shorter queues in shops, and smaller scale housing, which are very desirable for Russians.

I mean, it is not that sparkling as in many countries. Quite slow, but it fits me very much. After all these businesses in St. Petersburg and Moscow, when everything is too fast […] you are coming here, and this is an environment that I really want. (Ivan, St. Petersburg, 1 July 2010)

Absence of closely located neighbors in second home settlements in Finland provides additional possibilities for peace and quiet. In case Russian cottagers have neighbors, Finns respect private property and private life. This has been appreciated by respondents:

It is specially felt in Finland, and it is important – respect for private life and private property. That is the thing that is absent in Russia. (Nikolay & Natalia, Petrozavodsk, 9 September 2010)

Interviews show that inversion as a motive for second home ownership is strongly linked to such ownership in Finland. Cottage life in Finland is a synonym for calmness and quietness, which are opposite to the lifestyles in Russian urban centers.

Relaxation
Inversion from the urban environment is related closely to rest from a busy life. For the respondents, the preconditions for relaxation are quietness and comfort. Quietness is understood as a calmness of environment and an absence of disturbances at the cottage. Comfort is seen from the perspective of the technical equipment of the cottage, which reduces household chores. This in turn releases time for relaxation:

Comfort as having everything, including a dishwasher, a washing machine, an airing cupboard, a sauna […] to have less […] problems with house chores. (Alexey, Moscow, 12 August 2010)

For Russian cottagers, relaxation as a motive for second home ownership is not solely about a familiar place. The preconditions for relaxation have a wider interpretation, including surrounding environment and the appropriate technical equipment of the cottage.

Nature
Nature as a motive is linked to the countryside location of the cottage. Escaping from an urban environment and getting “back to nature” does not necessarily presume
simplicity of life at the cottage. Many owners have all modern facilities at their cottages. Nature as a motive for Russians is, first, nature itself. Russians are attracted by wild, untouched places, which they consider Finland still has:

When you boat on Saimaa, it is very pleasant there, because everything is in a state of nature. These places around Saimaa are very wild. (Anton, Moscow, 4 August 2010)

According to the respondents, climate and weather conditions in Finland are similar to those in Russia. Such similarity attracts second home owners from the senior age group (over 40 years old).

Similar climate, climate first of all, because people, we don’t become younger, that is why we don’t need a hot climate, exhausting heat. (Alexey, Moscow, 12 August 2010)

Another attractive similarity is landscape. Forest landscape is a familiar environment for citizens of Central and North-West Russia, which are the home areas of the respondents. Amenity landscapes in Finland are one more attraction. The Finnish Lakeland attracts domestic and foreign second home owners by the beauty of lake landscapes (see also Figure 2):

It is absolutely impossible to buy something in Russia close to major cities. So, my idea was to buy land in the region of lakes. (Ivan, St. Petersburg, 1 July 2010)

Nature as a motive for second home ownership is viewed differently by Russians. Going to the countryside in order to “plug into” nature and be surrounded by its beauty does not presume spending time in a “natural” way and abandoning modern facilities. Nature as a motive is more about surroundings as beautiful and wild places, as well as a context in terms of climatic conditions and familiar landscape.

Activities
The countryside location of a second home provides possibilities for different activities. Lakeside cottage locations encourage Russians to go fishing all year round; boating and swimming during the summer. Forest around the cottage is rich with mushrooms and berries, which Russian owners pick enthusiastically. Walking in the forest is also one of the most popular activities.

[A cottage was bought] only because of fishing, [fresh] air and remoteness, in order to rest calmly in clean nature, on clean water and to fish. (Roman, St. Petersburg, 17 June 2010)

Russian second home owners have been influenced by the Finnish sporting lifestyle. They try to use sports facilities existing in Finland: walking, skating, skiing, and swimming:
We see how children are more sport active here, and the whole population is sporty, we are trying to get into it and foster our children in this. (Vasily, Moscow, 25 August 2010)

A lot of activities of Russian second home owners are linked to arrangements around the house and the yard, and some construction. This indicates a rather recent ownership. Different second home owners are involved in various activities. Some spend their time in the cottage in an active way, others are more passive and prefer to relax and enjoy the calmness and beauty of the surroundings. Most of the activities are linked to organizing duties around the cottage, as well as to the surrounding nature: forest and lakes, where recreational activities are available all year round and are free of charge. Others, who use sports facilities available in the neighborhood, are usually families with children.

**Personal and Cultural**

*Dacha* tourism is a traditional form of leisure in Russian society with about half of the urban population engaged in second home recreation (Nefedova, 2012, Southworth, 2006). This strong cultural need for *dacha* recreation is not supplemented with a personal relationship to place; Russians do not have connections to their childhood or family ties in Finland.

Russians’ personal motives for second home ownership are rather close to those of British people in France. They are trying to find a countryside that is not available in Russia, the lost possibility to have a cottage in the forest by the lake.

They do not sell on the shores; we cannot have shores in property. (Anna & Ilya, St. Petersburg, 4 August 2010)

The strong cultural tradition of second home ownership is supplemented by the desire for a lake landscape and a private lake shore by the cottage. The latter opportunity cannot be fulfilled in Russia (see Water Code of the Russian Federation, 2006). Thus, personal and cultural motives have been realized on the Finnish side of the border.

**Status**

Russians own different types of second homes: from summer houses without basic amenities to brand new modern cottages of a size reaching up to 400 square meters. According to a real-estate agent, three groups of Russian buyers can be defined:

The first group [...] is looking for real grandmother houses that have all the amenities outside. For another big category cottages should be by the lake with all the amenities. One more numerically insignificant group wants necessarily a lake, all the amenities, new houses or from the 2000s on. (Snezhana, DomFinland, 29 June 2010)
Types of cottages vary according to recreational needs of Russian second home owners. Luxury cottages do not necessarily presume a desire to show a social status, but the way people engage in leisure. Furthermore, cottages’ locations in the forest provide few possibilities to demonstrate status to others. On the contrary, second home owners would like to distance themselves from it all:

I do not look at it from the perspective of presentability, because I have it enough in Piter [St. Petersburg], I see it from the perspective of comfort and coziness. I didn’t need big sizes; it is already done in Piter and no one to show off in front of. It is only for the kid, for me, for my wife to enjoy and rest. (Roman, St. Petersburg, 17 June 2010)

In sum, Russians are looking for cottages that would satisfy their leisure demands. According to the interview results, the status motive was not a leading motive for second home ownership in Finland. However, it is not clear whether foreign ownership influenced the status of Russian cottagers back in their home country.

Positive Image

The decision to purchase a second home in Finland is driven by the perceived better quality leisure. It concerns the issue of safety first of all. Safety presumes freedom to rest at the cottage and leave it without any worries that something will happen. In that sense Finland provides desirable levels of safety, which do not exist in Russia:

The main reason is safety. I mean whatever you do here, you will not be afraid that somebody will break in, something will be stolen. I can leave my yard like this for one month and nothing will change. (Ivan, St. Petersburg, 1 July 2010)

Safety is also one of the main reasons to choose Finland over Russia for cottage location. Respondents pointed out that a similar second home in Russia would require additional security measures. While some of the respondents already have dachas in Russia, others do not consider this option due to safety issues:

I do not want to have a cottage in Russia. I am not interested in living behind a concrete fence with a security guard. It is not possible to do it the other way yet. (Valery, Moscow region, 16 June 2010)

Safety is understood also as safety of investment. While some of the cottage owners had been aware about the level of safety, others were pleasantly surprised by it. In both cases, safety significantly influenced the decision of cottage purchase and increased the frequency of visits.

Russians are also attracted by the welcoming and peaceful atmosphere that meets them in Finland. The respondents described Finland with many adjectives: kindness, hospitality, calmness, clean, and a well-conditioned country. This extremely positive image of the country is supported by the good experiences Russians have had with Finns. Finns are considered as very calm, kind, polite, and very nice people, who are
always smiling at you. Finnish willingness to help was highlighted separately by many respondents.

The positive image of Finland that formed among Russian second home owners did not greatly change over time. If anything, it became stronger:

Since we bought real estate here, it is a mark that we have a very good impression about Finland and Finns. (Kirill, St. Petersburg, 20 August 2010)

The attractiveness and positive image of the second home area are supplemented by the built environment in Finland. As it was mentioned already, Russians described Finland as a clean and well-conditioned country, which is one more reason to choose it for second home location.

The cottage location in Finland is strongly influenced by the formed positive image of the country. Safety is one of the main and most important components of the image of Finland. It is supported by the general positive impression and experiences cottagers had in Finland.

**Distance**

Russian cottages in Finland are located in the upper border of the weekend zone. The relationship between distance and frequency of visits is present in the trips of the weekend zone cottagers (St. Petersburg and Petrozavodsk), who visit their cottages quite often whenever they want:

I wake up in the morning and if I want I come here. (Evgeny, St. Petersburg, 1 July 2010)

Among vacation zone cottagers (Muscovites), a clear dependency between distance and visitations is hard to trace. While some come to the cottage only during vacations and long holidays, others visit their cottage even for long weekends (three or four days):

On weekends, holidays, and vacations – I try to spend almost all free time in Finland; for a day, for a week, as it works out. (Valery, Moscow, 16 June 2010)

Even though overall distance appeared to have a minor influence, Russians considered distance for cottage location from the border, which should not exceed 150 km (see **Figure 1**). The state border itself, which involves certain formalities due to the visa regime and time expenditure, is not considered an obstacle. On the contrary, Finland is viewed as an easily accessible country in comparison to other European states: one can come by car without traveling through other countries, taking ferries or flying.

Location of a second home in Finland is not strongly distance determined. Transportation accessibility of Finland became a more important factor in the process of the site selection for a cottage. As a result, Russians frequently visit their second homes despite their remoteness from their permanent residence.
Price and Offers

Property prices attract Russian buyers to Finland. High prices of real estate in the countryside next to Moscow and St. Petersburg make the Finnish market more accessible (Finskikh, 2011). Prices came as a surprise for some owners.

You are saying so nicely, a cottage in Russia (laughing). We cannot afford a cottage in Russia. (Anastasia, St. Petersburg, 23 June 2010)

Maintenance costs of a cottage are not high either. Thus, in order to have better leisure conditions, Russians do not have to pay more, which is a very attractive reason for having a cottage in Finland.

The location of a cottage in the Savonlinna region particularly is dependent on the offers of real-estate agents. Among other factors are distance from the border and previous visits to the area and Finland in general.

For Russian second home owners, the lower prices of second homes in Finland influenced the country choice. The particular location of a cottage inside Finland was defined by the offers of real-estate agents and within the preferable remoteness from the border.

Discussion

This paper has explored Russians’ motives for second home ownership in Finland, using the Savonlinna region in the province of South Savo as a case study area (see Figures 1 and 2). According to the results, desire for a contrast to everyday city life cannot be fulfilled in the densely built-up dacha villages around Russian cities. Like for Germans in Sweden, “the low population density as well as secluded location of many cottages” (Müller, 1999, p. 203) create a desirable contrast to everyday life for Russians in Finland. Quietness and wider personal space in Finland create all the preconditions for inversion, as well as for relaxation. Russians do not seek simplicity but want technical facilities at the cottage. Thus, what Hall and Müller (2004, p. 12) called “back to nature” as a nature-motive has a different connotation in relation to Russian second home ownership.

Russians are attracted both by natural and built environments in Finland: by its wild places and its built and social infrastructure. Similar to the motives of the British in rural France (Hoggart & Buller, 1995), Russians are looking for a countryside that is not available in their home country. In Finland one can have a cottage by the lake, while in Russia lake landscapes are subject to substantial resource constraints (Water Code of the Russian Federation, 2006). Nature amenities, quietness, good experiences with hosts as well as lower prices abroad are also common features of Germans, British, and Russians (Hoggart & Buller, 1995; Müller, 1999). Activities play a secondary role in the process of property acquisition. Status as a motive was not significant, new and spacious cottages serve only recreation purposes.

Russians’ frequent journeys for holidays to Finland have transformed the connection with the country through second home ownership. Such a trend is an indicator of the high attractiveness of the area and a positive image of the destination (Müller, 1999).
The amenity factor overcomes the distance factor for cottage location. Even though Russian second homes in Finland are located in border areas (Figure 1), only some of the cottagers are coming from the border area on the Russian side. Russians’ journeys surpass the critical point of 200 km for cottage location (Kauppila, 2010). Only distance from the border matters: the cottage should be located within 150 km from the border.

Russian second home ownership in Finland puts under scrutiny the statement that long-distance second home ownership is a privilege of higher income category owners who have greater mobility through faster means of transportation (Hall & Müller, 2004; Kauppila, 2010). Russian cottagers have different financial backgrounds: upper class owners, who travel by fast public transport, and middle-class owners, who are traveling by private car. Middle-class owners comprise the majority among Russian cottagers. It is partially a result of the price rates of second homes in Finland that are significantly lower than in the suburban regions of Russian megalopolises. With the lower price for leisure, Russians cottagers get such conditions for a holiday they yearn for in the homeland: rich amenities and lower prices have made the Finnish second home property market more attractive to Russians.

Transportation accessibility of Finland enables making private journeys irrespective of the public transport connection. Thus, frequency of visits and length of stay depend on the personal choice of the cottagers. The visa regime and the state border between the two states are insignificant factors for second home owners. In the same vein, cultural and linguistic differences are seen as surmountable. Country choice is also driven by a strong positive image of Finland. Safety, both physical and economic, is one of the top reasons to have a second home in Finland, as similar leisure conditions are not possible to experience in Russia.

In sum, the main motives for second home ownership and its location in Finland are the positive image in terms of conditions of safety and personal experience; nature as untouched forestland, clean environment, and climate conditions; and lake landscape meaning personal ownership of the shore. As a result, the location of a second home in Finland has a number of advantages and maintains Russian demand in the Finnish second home property market.

Conclusions

Russian second home ownership in Finland highlights the importance of studying new cases and motives for such trans-border ownership, which increase the knowledge of driving factors in choosing one destination over others. Even though motives do not change over time, the ways to satisfy needs are many, and vary from case to case and affecting choices.

Similar to the Nordic tradition of second home recreation, dacha tourism is deeply embedded in the leisure practices of Russians. It contrasts, however, to the Nordic simple way of living: Russians are looking for higher standard dwellings in Finland. The results show that the motives of Russians are more complex and significantly differ from the general motives for second home ownership defined in the literature (see e.g. Hall & Müller, 2004; Jaakson, 1986). Differences are driven by the cultural background of the cottagers, which is an important factor to take into account when
studying second homes (Müller, 2006). Second homes with a history of three centuries are an integral part of urban life in Russia (Lovell, 2003). Thus, second home tourism is a strong cultural motive for cottage ownership even abroad. Furthermore, social conditions in Russia result in the outflow of investments from the country. The lack of rule of law, which makes Russia “not a secure or socially just place to live” (Shleifer & Treisman, 2004, p. 22), and economic instability in the state (Glinkina et al., 2001) encourage Russians to search for a secure place abroad. Thus, rule of law and economic stability in Finland attract Russians. This safe haven in Finland has become a new interpretation of a destination image as a motive for second home ownership. While other studies emphasize attractiveness and overall impression of the destination as an image-motive (Müller, 1999, 2002), the Russian case has brought a different understanding.

Despite the general assumption that foreign ownership is associated with risk and uncertainty (Müller, 1999), Russians have chosen Finland because it is abroad and perceived as risk-free. Cultural differences and legislation between home and host countries are reasons for foreign ownership. Russian purchases abroad are driven by the social insecurity in their own country. A probable introduction of a unitary property tax in Russia would encourage the growth of investments in foreign estate (Fomchenkov, 2012). Furthermore, Russian purchases abroad are also affected by the current political and economic situation in Europe. Crises in Greece and the weak economies of other EU-members have resulted in euro exchange rate volatility, which stimulates Euro-holders to invest their savings in real estate abroad (Berezina, 2012; Fomchenkov, 2012).

Russian second home ownership in Finland requires further examination from the perspective of integration and participation in the host society, since Russians represent a culturally and linguistically distinct group of foreigners. It is especially important to look at obstacles to involvement and potential for conflicts, as Russian second home ownership is not welcomed by many Finns (Pitkänen, 2011). Moreover, the phenomenon has raised a heated debate in the Finnish parliament concerning restricting Russian property purchases in Finland (Malin, 2012). Thus, there is a need for further research, since the phenomenon involves wide social and political discussions in Finland.

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