Bridging social capital and the resource potential of second homes: The case of Stintino, Sardinia

Nick Gallent

UCL Bartlett School of Planning, Central House, 14 Upper Woburn Place, London WC1H 0NN, UK

Abstract

This paper is concerned with social capital, and in particular the bridging social capital that the owners of second homes bring to rural communities. Using a study of second home owners in Stintino, northern Sardinia, it examines how seasonal residents use the resources of their extended social networks to shape and influence local agendas (around planning, housing, services etc.) and to assist community development. The paper builds on a framework for examining the social value of second homes (Gallent, 2014), which proposed that the distended socio-professional networks of some rural communities can be extended, by non-permanent residents, to embrace new resource potentials, and that second homes therefore have a clear social value for communities which would otherwise have a more limited store of social capital. That framework also cautioned, however, that non-permanent residents may use that capital in pursuit of interests that do not align with those of the host community, therefore causing conflict as newcomers/seasonal residents seek to shape their local environment according to their particular tastes and values, sometimes in opposition to local need. The research for this paper was undertaken in August 2013. It involved nine detailed interviews with second home owners in Stintino and a series of focus group discussions. Stintino is located on the Sardinian mainland opposite the Asinara archipelago. It is 50 km by road from the city of Sassari, which is principal home to many seasonal residents.

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1. Introduction

The purchasing of second homes in the countryside, or in coastal areas, is often viewed negatively. External demand for local housing — expressed by relatively wealthy non-local buyers — brings disruptions to the property market, causing a social transformation (as those on lower incomes are ‘priced out’) that may have a negative impact on schools and other local services. Second homes are generally viewed as a bad thing, even though investment in and the renovation of property (alongside new tax receipts) may bring new money to struggling rural or coastal economies. There has been great deal of interest in second home purchasing in recent years, amongst rural geographers (e.g. Halfacree, 2012), planners (e.g. Gallent and Tewdwr-Jones, 2001), sociologists (e.g. Blekesaune et al., 2010; Huijbens, 2012) and those working in the tourism field (e.g. Hall and Müller, 2004). In the UK, a long-running shortage of housing in rural areas (see Satsangi et al., 2010) is seen to be compounded by a number of generally unwelcome demand pressures, of which second homes are just one. There have been periodic political campaigns against second home buying, locally and in the UK Parliament. Attempts have been made curb the number of existing homes that can be ‘converted’ to second home use (Gallent et al., 2005); the wanton destruction of rural communities by urban investors, who show little empathy with the needs of those communities, has become a core part of the urban-rural discourse, especially in England and Wales.

However, there is a broader cultural perspective on second home purchase and use that does not adhere to this typically Anglophone narrative. In the Nordic countries, for example, second homes are viewed not only as important domiciles for vacation and recreation, but also part of a broader ‘folklore’ (Müller, 2007: 193) with many second homes being ‘inherited and passed on through generations’ (ibid, 194) making them more permanent than many first homes, which may be sold and exchanged more readily during an owners working life. There is a sense in many places of second homes being part of a cultural heritage (Lagerqvist, 2014). In some instances, they may even be viewed as ‘social compensation for a
reduced full-time population’ (Farstad, 2013: 330). In both the Nordic countries and in parts of southern Europe, second homes often exist within ‘sub-regional markets’ in which many second home owners acquire, often through inheritance, or retain property in nearby communities where they have strong family connections (Gallent et al., 2005: 129). Petersson (1999: 9) has suggested that second homes may either occupy a distant ‘vacation space’ (as they often do in England, with buyers acquiring investment property in far-away locations where they have no prior connection) or a daily/ weekend ‘leisure space’ (close to the ‘permanent’ family home, often in locations with which they have some family link). A common feature of the latter scenario is that the economy in that ‘leisure space’ has changed (often restructuring away from primary industry to tourism); families may have moved away some decades ago to a new ‘production’ space, but have retained property and cultural ties. People have a closer relationship to a leisure space than a vacation space; they are closer to being part of the community, but because they have access to the resources of their working world (but an interest in the wellbeing of their leisure space), they may develop a key role in drawing extra-local resources into rural or coastal communities, by acting as ‘bridges’ and expanding the social capital of communities in a way that allows them to help tackle important social and economic challenges. In this paper, I investigate the extent to which second home owners introduce beneficial bridging social capital to the community of Stintino in northern Sardinia.

2. Social capital as framing concept

The detailed development of this framework is contained in Gallent (2014). It begins by using Agnitsch and colleagues’ (2006: 36) basic definition of social capital as the ‘resource potential of social relationships’ before drawing a distinction between social capital produced through the direct ‘bonding’ of near-neighbours, which delivers trust, reciprocity and solidarity within a community (Putnam, 2000: 22) and that produced through ‘bridging’ across extra-local ties. Agnitsch et al. (2006) claim that how much a ‘closed’ community can achieve (in terms of shaping agendas or services, or delivering self-help) is limited by the extent of local skills and knowledge. Social capital is accumulated slowly and incrementally. On the other hand, big gains can come from connecting or ‘bridging’ to external resources and networks. Using Granovetter’s theory of ‘weak ties’ (1973), Gallent’s (2014) basic assertion is that second home owners, who perhaps bond only weakly with others in a host community (unless they have family connections therein), may occupy powerful positions in an extendable social network because of their wider professional connections. They have the potential to become ‘bridges’, acting as ‘autonomous’ social ties, able to contribute something distinctly different from the ‘embedded’ social capital that is accumulated through everyday bonding between permanent residents (Woolcock, 1998: 164). This distinction has been used in other areas of rural research to gauge the extent to which communities, or certain types of individual therein, are able to access external knowledge, ideas, skills and resources. Magnani and Struffi (2009), for example, have analysed the extent to which farmers in the Valt di Sole (in the Italian province of Trento) benefit from their ‘[…] ties with institutions and organisations external to the farmers’ professional world’ (p. 233); with that immediate professional world comprising local community groups or farming associations that act as hubs for interaction between neighbours. That study suggested a predominance of bonding over bridging ties.

Yet other studies have hinted at a more important role for bridging ties in certain arenas of community life, highlighting a particular role for second home owners in breaking down the isolation that some communities experience and in adding to the store of ‘productive’ social capital (Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000). Rye (2011: 265) for example, argues that:

The presence of ‘urbanites’ in [rural] 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.

The arrival of ‘urbanites’ can be viewed as part of a ‘reconfiguration process’ that challenges the conventional ‘decline narrative’ often attached to rural communities (Amit, 2002; quoted in Carmo and Santos, 2014: 188) and sees them instead as dynamic and non-exclusive. Carmo and Santos (2014: 189) follow Putnam (2000) and others in arguing that although ‘bonding is an essential condition for the creation and reproduction of social capital’, the transformation processes that have taken root in contemporary societies have challenged static concepts of community and focused attention on the ‘dynamics in the production of social capital’ (Carmo and Santos, 2014: 189). They note that spatial mobility, along with the ‘intensification of connections with more urban areas’, mean that rural communities have become places in which the close trust and interpersonal knowledge produced through bonding ‘coexist with other forms of relationship’ generated by the social transformation of rural communities. Their hypothesis, therefore, is that bonding and other variant forms of social capital produce an altogether different type of community: one characterised by diverse levels of trust and the co-existence of ‘new groups and different social categories’ (ibid, 190). Their research, in two Portuguese municipalities in the Algarve region, highlights how different levels of mobility and connectivity — displayed by different sections of communities (notably older residents versus younger or intermediate age groups) — may generate ‘privileged knowledge networks’ in which the young become more easily embedded. These knowledge networks produce communities with more diversified forms of social capital. However, this analysis is mainly concerned with the degree of closure produced by geographical isolation rather than the productive value of diversified social capital. There is no focus on urbanities, or non-locals, as explicit bridges to external resources in the sense introduced by Rye (2011).

This perceived ‘bridging’ role for non-locals has seldom been studied directly, but some indications of how bridges are built, and benefits delivered, are provided by Huijbens (2012) and by Gallent and Robinson (2012). Huijbens’ study of second home areas in North Iceland identified the presence of a ‘creative’ class with an ‘urge to use their knowledge and skills to benefit the [adopted] home town’ (Huijbens, 2012: 15). They did so in order to ‘prove their worth’ and develop a sense of ‘belonging’. In Gallent and Robinson’s (2012) study of villages around Ashford in southern England, local opposition to a proposed housing development was strengthened by the presence of ‘prize winning architects’ (ibid. 92) in the area — who commuted to their practices in London — and by the retired editors of broad-sheet newspapers. With these extra-local resources at their disposal, the ‘community council was able to embark on a successful technical and PR campaign against the development proposal, which was eventually withdrawn’ (Gallent, 2014: 12).

The non-local households in Gallent and Robinson’s study were not second home owners. Rather, they comprised commuters and retired professionals. In the example of ‘strengthened’ local opposition cited, it just so happened that the conservative and
protectionist values of the settled population aligned with those of the new households. The majority agreed that the development should be stopped, and the majority will prevailed. But one of the problems with the idea that newcomers will help a community achieve an agreed goal is that there may in fact be disagreement around the desired outcome. The experience in England is that new (or seasonal) residents often enter communities with different value sets (that may be tangential to the ‘stable’ culture that has developed over time, though everyday social exchange) and possibly a ‘transformative agenda’. This has happened in England because newcomers to the countryside often arrive with pre-conceptions of rural areas: as tranquil, free from development and idyllic (Bell, 2006). If they have arrived from an urban area, they often understand ‘the rural’ in opposition to ‘the urban’ and that understanding is expressed through hostility to all forms of change and development (Satsangi et al., 2010). In his notion of ‘habitus’, Bourdieu (2005) posits that introduced values are an engine of change in many different contexts; 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 in many different fields. Second homes have become a source of conflict in England not only because of the distortions they create in the property market, but because new values and new ways of thinking are introduced that result in ‘struggles or competitions that generate change’ (ibid, 47) and for many communities, that change has not been welcome. In and around Ashford, however, newcomers have generally wanted the same things as dominant sections of the settled population: strict limits on development and the preservation of village character. Elsewhere, there may not be the same degree of alignment between existing and incoming values; and migration, whether seasonal or permanent, may become a source of social friction.

A number of questions can be extracted from this brief discussion of bridging social capital and the alignment of different values (and objectives) in second home communities. These are elaborated upon in Gallent (2014) and relate to:

1. 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 extra-local resources;
2. 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’;
3. the extent to which these bridges are ‘autonomous’ (Woolcock, 1998) perhaps implying that second home owners are disconnected from immediate neighbours and therefore 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);
4. 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 (misaligning) with communities seeking an active programme of residential and economic development. Alternatively, second home buyers may reject conservatism and become embedded in pro-growth or developmental community agendas. Stronger connectivity (to a host community), perhaps resulting from family ties, may lead to greater alignment with a prevailing culture; and finally
5. 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 (and conflict with) 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.

These questions are simplified into three areas of empirical analysis at the beginning of the case study. The introduction to that study starts in the next section, where I examine patterns of second home purchasing in Italy. This is followed by a brief look at patterns in Sardinia and an introduction to Stintino itself. Thereafter, I will return to the key questions emerging from the discussion above as a means of structuring an analysis of the extent to which second home owners introduce a new form of bridging social capital.

3. Second homes in Italy

The function and (internal) perception of Italy’s rural areas has changed drastically since the Second World War. Padovani and Vettoreto (2003; 96) identify three phases in rural development. In the 1950s and 1960s, rural areas tended to be viewed negatively, as backwaters of poverty and deprivation, untouched by post-war development. By the 1970s and early 1980s, they had begun to emerge from economic stagnation and were beginning to embrace new economic activities, including tourism. And by the later 1980s and 1990s, rural areas had become spaces for ‘new social praxis’: offering opportunities for a range of tourism activities and consumption. This functional shift tracked the rise in Italian second home ownership: the proportion of total dwellings classed as second homes increased from 5.7% in 1951 to 21.1% in 1991 (ibid, 90). Today, the figure appears to be around 16% although definitions have changed and some non-principal residences have been attributed to other housing types (Dipartimento delle Finanze e Agenzia del Territorio, 2012: 20). Much of the increase from 1951 to 1991 resulted from the development of ‘tourist apartments or houses’ (case/appartamenti turistici), often in coastal areas. These are henceforth referred to as ‘purpose-built SHs’. Padovani and Vettoreto are critical of this trend, claiming that it was ‘peripheral’ to more ‘intelligent tourism’ (Padovani and Vettoreto, 2003: 100) that took root in Italy during the latter part of this period, in support of place-identity, traditional products and crafts, and which respected local heritage and landscape. New purpose-built SH developments often spread out from coastal towns, but this trend seemed to give way, in the 1990s and 2000s, to the acquisition of existing buildings, residential and non-residential, that could be ‘refurbished and transformed into second homes’ with relatively limited impact on the local environment or housing market (ibid, 100) and seemed often to be an expression of buyers’ desire to reconnect with what they saw as their rural roots.

Geographically, patterns of second home production and use have been diverse. In the Alps and Dolomites, small towns have sometimes been swollen by ski-chalet development. This has also happened along many coastlines, from Liguria in the north-west, around the boot of Calabria and Puglia, and back along the Adriatic coast. It has also affected the islands, around Catania and Palermo in Sicily; and the Costa Smerelda in Sardinia — which really took off with the arrival of the Aga Khan in the 1960s (Alvarez Leon
and Cappai, 2011: no page number). In more recent years, international investment has affected this pattern, with new developments springing up in some of the most sought-after locations, which have been made more accessible by budget airlines. In its more up-market form, international investment also accounts for the longer-term trend of urban second homes in Rome and in Tuscany. Away from the most popular developments, smaller schemes have been promoted by local developers, keen to attract the residents of nearby towns and cities to the coast for summer vacations. The Sardinian coast, for example, is dotted with purpose-built SHs attached to coastal villages. The various regulations that have allowed this ‘urbanisation of the Sardinian coast’ to happen at different times are outlined by Alvarez Leon and Cappai (2011).

4. Sardinia and Stintino

That same study by Alvarez Leon and Cappai (2011) places purpose-built SH development in the context of broader tourism patterns in Sardinia. In 2009, data from the Osservatorio Economico Regionale Autonoma della Sardegna revealed that more than 840,000 visitors arrived in the province of Olbia-Tempio (affording access to the north-east and east coasts), 850,000 to Cagliari (in the south), and 392,000 to Sassari (which covers much of the north coast and the north-west, comprising Stintino and Alghero). These data indicate the general pattern of tourist concentration on the island: the Costa Smerelda including La Maddalena is the prime destination, followed by the south and then the north-west (Alvarez Leon and Cappai, 2011: no page number). As well as pulling together a range of secondary data, the researchers conducted interviews with tourists and the owners of purpose-built SHs on the beaches of eight coastal comune. More than 1800 interviews were undertaken, revealing that nearly 90% of visitors were Italian; almost half from the northern mainland and fewer than 10% were ‘local’. Those renting purpose-built second homes (or based in hotels) stayed for a couple of weeks; but those owning purpose-built second homes tended to remain in the coastal comune for typically more than a month — throughout much of the long summer ferie (holidays).

Using data from Italy’s official statistics provider (ISTAT), Alvarez Leon and Cappai were able to identify and map a total of 83,597 Seconda Residenza nella Costa Sarda (SRCs). There were found to be 4728 second homes, mostly purpose built, in Stintino. Their interviews showed that families visiting Sardinia in the summer typically comprise four persons. When fully occupied, there are approximately 20,000 seasonal second home residents in Stintino.

Stintino is a comune with approximately 1500 full-time inhabitants in the province of Sassari, north-west Sardinia. It stretches along a peninsula south of the Island of Asinara, from Capo Falcone in the north to Pozzo San Nicola in the south. Until 1988, Stintino was a frazione of Sassari (i.e. within the administrative jurisdiction of that city), but became an independent comune in August of that year. Stintino’s principal settlement is Stintino itself, located in the north of the comune and bordered by several frazioni, including Le Vele, Ezzi Mannu and Rocca Ruja, which have all been a focus for purpose-built SH development since the 1960s. Stintino owes its existence to a decision, taking by the Italian government in the 1880s, to locate a penal colony at Cala d’Oliva and a sanatorium at Cala Reale on the Island of Asinara. This decision forced people to leave the island, which was at that time home to around 500 residents, half of whom were shepherds of Sardinian origin and the other half fishermen from Camogli on the Liguria coast. The fishermen had transferred to Sardinia with the development of the tuna industry. They brought with them the ‘Ligure’ dialect from Camogli. This mixed with the local Sassarese dialect to produce ‘Stintinese’ and a local culture that fuses fishing with a pastoral tradition. In the same year as the sanatorium and penal colony were established, two brothers from Sassari purchased land at Cala Savoia on the mainland, between two small coastal inlets. The purchase was made possible through a pooling of compensation received from the Government by forty-five families forced to leave the Asinara, but who wished to remain on the peninsula (other families moved to Sassari or other parts of northern Sardinia). A plan was developed for a new settlement between the inlets (which later became Porto Vecchio and Porto Nuovo) which the brothers called istintinu in Sassarese (‘intestine’): now ‘Stintino’. Stintino remained confined between the inlets/ports for much of the twentieth century, only extending into frazioni to its north from the late 1960s onwards as the peninsula began to develop a tourism-based economy, with visitors attracted to the beaches at Le Saline, Il Gabbiano, L’Ancora, Ezzi Mannu, Pazzona and Punta Negra. But arguably Stintino’s chief attractions are the beach at La Pelosa — considered one of the most beautiful in Europe — and access from Stintino to what is now the Asinara National Park, created in 1997.

Using the data from Alvarez Leon and Cappai (2011), which again reveals that there are 4728 second homes in Stintino, it can be surmised that the vast majority of Stintino’s summer residents are second home users and owners. There are likely to be around 20,000 persons — children and adults — in the second homes, and added to these are the several thousand visitors in the peninsula and many hotels and guest houses. In order to estimate total tourist numbers, day-visitors — i.e. locals from Sassari and tourists on day-trips from Alghero — need to be added to these figures. It is likely, although no data are available, that there are 40,000 plus visitors and seasonal residents on the northern part of the peninsula on a summer’s day: more than 96% of the summer population is seasonal.

5. Research approach

Many of Stintino’s purpose-built SHs are concentrated in an area of roughly 3 km² (Fig. 1). To the north of Porto Nuovo, the first area of such development is located at Tanca Manna (where development is ongoing). Tanca Manna is a short walk from the town centre. The development then extends along the peninsula’s main road (SP34) with areas of purpose-built SHs at Le Vele (a small easterly headland), then north towards L’Ancora and onwards to La Pelosa and ending at Cape Falcone, where development from the 1980s and 1990s now clings to the steep slopes that precede the high cliffs of the cape itself. A number of hotels are mixed in with this development, most notably the large four-storey Rocca Ruja Hotel that dominates the headland. The most northerly purpose-built SH developments are 4.5 km from Stintino but are served by a small selection of shops at Cape Falcone. The sprawling development at Le Vele is served by a larger shopping centre at Cala Lupo. Stintino itself has one larger and a number of smaller supermarkets, two grocers, a butcher’s shop, a fishmonger, a chemist, two hairdressers, two cash-points, a post office, a number of restaurants and cafes, and a large number of shops selling beachwear, Sardinian porcelain products or souvenirs.

The study — addressing the five questions listed earlier — was undertaken during the month of August (in 2013) — when a great many second home owners are in Stintino. In-depth interviews were undertaken with nine second home owners, and these were followed up with further one-to-one discussions and informal focus groups. The nine owners were all known to each other and comprise a network of friends that comes together during the long summer ferie which begin when schools close in early June and extend to the beginning of September. The purpose of the study was to test the potential of second home owners to bridge to extra-local resources in a single area with very specific characteristics; it sought to confirm, or refute, the general validity of the ideas set out
earlier in this paper and in Gallent (2014). The group was known to comprise individuals with and without family connection to Stintino and who had varying lengths of association with the town. This was a small group of individuals relative to the large number of second home owners and seasonal visitors to the peninsular. But many similar groups descend upon Stintino during the summer months, comprising people who are normally resident in Sassari and who often have long-standing relationships with other mainland Italians who regularly holiday in the area. Their patterns of relationship with permanently-resident household may be similar to those examined in this study, though there are doubtless others whose experiences are very different. Using a qualitative approach, the study hoped to be able to explore one set of possible relationships with the town and its inhabitants, demonstrating a diversity of social capitals (see Carmo and Santos, 2014) rather than a definitive set of relationships that second home owners share with host communities.

The groups of seasonal residents described above can be found in small co-located clusters on the many beautiful beaches on the eastern side of the peninsula. These are frequently ‘Spiagge in Concessione’, where rights to the beach have been sold by the Comune to local businessmen who hire out beach loungers and parasols to tourists. Those owning the ‘concessions’ often erect signs clarifying that ‘access to the beach is free’, but will prevent non-paying beach-goers from laying towels on the sand between the parasols. The proliferation of Spiagge in Concessione in Italy has been hugely controversial. The law (Legge Finanziaria 2006, art.1, c. 251) sets out a general right of access to the sea and clarifies that the granting of a concession does not infer a property right. It remains the responsibility of the comune to deliver a balance between Spiagge in Concessione and Spiagge Libere (free beaches). However, the areas of free access seems to shrink every year as the comune seeks to maximise profit from the beaches. In Stintino, a front row pair of loungers with a parasol will command a rent of €1200 per month during the high season.

The various social networks of second home owners are often spread across the different purpose-built SH developments of the peninsula, but come together on the Spiagge in Concessione. This is where interview pro-forma were distributed and interviews undertaken.

The pro-forma provided a structure for the interviews, splitting questions into three sections which corresponded with the five areas of conceptual concern described above:

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<th>Conceptual Foci</th>
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<td>Second home owners as incidental bridges to extra local resources</td>
<td>Characteristics of second home owners and the ways they connect with local residents</td>
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<td>Connectivity to multiple networks and the kinds of bridges built</td>
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<td>Connection or disconnection from immediate neighbours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misalignment or alignment with local agendas</td>
<td>How agendas are agreed and how second home owners get involved</td>
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<td>Conflict with local culture/agendas or agreement around shared concerns</td>
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A series of questions about the interviewee, their background and their connection with Stintino sought to build a picture of the potential bridges that might be built and how these might afford access to ‘extra local resources’. A second series of questions then focused on the perceived challenges (mainly service challenges) faced in the comune and how understanding of these challenges had been informed (e.g. in discussions with other residents) and what responsive actions had been taken. Finally, interviews focused on the general relationship between permanent and seasonal residents, the embeddedness of second home owners within Stintino and the conflicts that may have arisen. Despite the relatively small number of subjects, the characteristics of interviewees was mixed. Geographically, their second homes were dispersed across the peninsula: some located in Stintino old town, and others in the various purpose-built SH developments to the north. Connections ranged from those whose great-grandparents had been amongst the forty-five families forced to leave the Asinara in the 1880s (but who now reside in Sassari), to relative new-comers from outside Sardinia. All those interviewed, however, were Italian. Very few second homes in Stintino are owned by foreigners. The small number that are could be readily identified by members of the interview group. Stintino is an area of predominantly Italian-owned second homes, and differs in this respect from the more ‘up-market’ Costa Smerelda, which is seasonal home to a great many foreign buyers.

6. Seasonal residents and community development in Stintino

6.1. Characteristics and connections

The basic profiles of those interviewed are set out in the next table. In order to respect the anonymity of individuals, personal names have been omitted but an F or M in the subject notation indicates gender.

Six of the seasonal residents have their main homes in Sassari. Although they base themselves in Stintino during the ferie, they occasional made trips back to the city during the summer for reasons of work or family. The other three either fly or take the ferry to Sardinia for the summer. The three non-Sassarese owners all acquired their second homes in the 1980s. SUB1_F’s was bought by her grandfather; SUB5_M’s by his parents; and SUB6_F’s by her mother-in-law. They have all been regular visitors to Stintino for thirty years and have made a great number of friends in the area. Their experiences are very similar. The Sassarese owners, on the other hand, have a more mixed experience of second home ownership in Stintino. SUB3_F, SUB7_M and SUB8_F have all owned their homes since the mid-1970s to early 1980s. None of them indicated any deeper family association with the town, despite prompting. SUB2_F, on the other hand, inherited her purpose-built SH near Capo Falcone from her parents, who had previously owned a house in the old town. SUB4_M and SUB9_F have the deepest roots in Stintino. They are brother and sister, but each with their own history of second home ownership in the comune. Their great-great-grandfather acquired land for relocation in the 1880s. SUB9_F’s current second home at Tanca Manna was built 14 years ago and she and her husband have owned it throughout that period. SUB4_M built his second home in the old town three years ago, but on the site of a dilapidated property that had been owned by his grandfather. Their father was born in Stintino but moved to Sassari for work more than 40 years ago. He retained his home in the town and SUB4_M and SUB9_F grew up living part-time in Sassari and part-time in Stintino:

My father and my grandparents were born in Stintino. My grandfather had been a homeowner and a resident in Stintino since the beginning of the twentieth century, whilst my father bought his own home in the 1960s. His house was previously owned by my great-grandparents and it [came to be used] mainly during the summer months, and sometimes during the winter months too (SUB9_F).

There are many similar seasonal residents in the town, but these are now outnumbered by owners without any deeper family connection to Stintino. A great many acquired newly-built SHs outside of the old town in the 1980s. SUB1_F, SUB5_M and SUB6_F are typical in that respect. Owners from Milan (and elsewhere in Lombardy) and Rome (or wider Lazio region) arrive in Sardinia by Ferry, from the mainland ports of Genoa and Civitavecchia (to the north of Rome). Many cars (with multiple new and old ‘Sardinia Ferries’ stickers in their rear windows) have Roma and Milano plates, and the distinctive accents of these visitors are regularly heard on the beaches.

The degree of place attachment exhibited by the owners was universally high. Even for those whose history does not extend any further back than the 1980s, seasonal residence in Stintino has become ‘inter-generational’ and there was a clear sense that the opportunity to spend time on the peninsula was something that owners hoped to pass on to their children:

Stintino is simply a wonderful place; a corner of paradise just a few kilometres from our main city of residence. Since childhood we have spent time in this place, and now that we are a family we are passing onto our children what our parents introduced to us (SUB2_F).

The same sentiment was expressed by SUB4_M and SUB9_F, whose families shared a ‘passion for fishing, diving, and the wonderful sea’. All the other owners, whether from Sassari or not, had a long association with the area. Although SUB5_M’s parents had not bought a house until the 1980s, he had been holidaying in the area since his childhood. The same was true for SUB3_F and SUB7_M. And for all owners, the convenience of the place (close to Sassari or the ferry port at Porto Torres) and its beauty ensured that they returned to Stintino each year, despite over-development having denuded that beauty since the 1960s (SUB5_M).

With the exceptions of SUB8_F and SUB6_F, all of the seasonal owners are economically active. The ‘occupations’ listed in Table 1 do not paint the full picture of professional engagement. SUB2_F’s husband, for example, describes himself and his wife as ‘business entrepreneurs’; SUB5_M and SUB3_F describe themselves as ‘office workers’, which gives few clues as to their professional capacities, although other interviewees hinted at SUB5_M’s senior position in

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There are many similar seasonal residents in the town, but these are now outnumbered by owners without any deeper family connection to Stintino. A great many acquired newly-built SHs outside of the old town in the 1980s. SUB1_F, SUB5_M and SUB6_F are typical in that respect. Owners from Milan (and elsewhere in Lombardy) and Rome (or wider Lazio region) arrive in Sardinia by Ferry, from the mainland ports of Genoa and Civitavecchia (to the north of Rome). Many cars (with multiple new and old ‘Sardinia Ferries’ stickers in their rear windows) have Roma and Milano plates, and the distinctive accents of these visitors are regularly heard on the beaches.

The degree of place attachment exhibited by the owners was universally high. Even for those whose history does not extend any further back than the 1980s, seasonal residence in Stintino has become ‘inter-generational’ and there was a clear sense that the opportunity to spend time on the peninsula was something that owners hoped to pass on to their children:

Stintino is simply a wonderful place; a corner of paradise just a few kilometres from our main city of residence. Since childhood we have spent time in this place, and now that we are a family we are passing onto our children what our parents introduced to us (SUB2_F).

The same sentiment was expressed by SUB4_M and SUB9_F, whose families shared a ‘passion for fishing, diving, and the wonderful sea’. All the other owners, whether from Sassari or not, had a long association with the area. Although SUB5_M’s parents had not bought a house until the 1980s, he had been holidaying in the area since his childhood. The same was true for SUB3_F and SUB7_M. And for all owners, the convenience of the place (close to Sassari or the ferry port at Porto Torres) and its beauty ensured that they returned to Stintino each year, despite over-development having denuded that beauty since the 1960s (SUB5_M).

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the Comune di Roma, and SUB9_F and her husband own and manage a building company that has undertaken residential projects in Stintino. SUB4_M, with his strong family ties in the town, did not merely rebuild his grandfather’s house in the old town, but created a small complex comprising two apartments (one which he and his family occupies seasonally and one which has been rented out for several months each year to a family from the Italian mainland) and a small shop/gallery which has been occasionally rented out for summer exhibitions. The core group of nine, interviewed for this study, were also connected on the beach to numerous daily-visiters from Sassari, many working in the comune (di Sassari) or in the legal or construction professions.

This group of second home owners comprises a network of friends, family and business associates. Some members of that group have exhibited more than a ‘seasonal association’ with Stintino, making significant investments in the comune, and all have long associations and vested interests. The investments have required a higher level of interaction with the comune and permanent residents, and there was a clear division in the group between those who have had more reason to connect to local networks (usually bureaucratic ones) and those who, having inherited property in the area, now merely visit the chemist once a week or occasionally frequent local restaurants. SUB7_M, SUB5_M and SUB8_F emphasised their social contacts with permanent residents, with whom SUB7_M claimed ‘strong and sincere relationships’. SUB9_F, on the other hand, alluded to her close relationships with Stintino émigrés (now residing with their families in Sassari) and SUB4_M’s social contact with permanent residents was confined to old acquaintances of his father and other relatives. But for SUB2_F, SUB9_F and SUB4_M, familial links meant the retention of social ties in Stintino. It was claimed that many older residents remembered SUB9_F and SUB4_M’s father and knew him as a local man.

Yet, for the most part, contact with permanent residents happened in the old town’s shops or in the cafés and restaurants near La Pelosa or at Capo Falcone. The seasonal residents are on holiday. The permanent residents are working. These different reasons for being in Stintino determine when interaction happens and for what purpose, although the old Town’s shops close in the heat of the afternoon and some permanent residents join their seasonal counterparts on the beaches. The beaches provide a focus for social interaction, mainly between second home owners, but occasionally with those business owners with whom seasonal residents have built relationships, usually over many years. That said, the price of basic goods (fish, meat, wine and general groceries) in Stintino colours the feelings of many second home owners towards ‘local people’. An edition of La Nuova Sardegna (one of a number of regional newspapers, printed in Sassari) featured an article in 2013 claiming that tourists coming to Stintino are ‘squeezed like lemons’. The prices of some goods in the town are far higher than prices in Sassari. This has led SUB3_F to ‘bring everything with [her] from outside Stintino, as far as possible’ and SUB9_F does all her shopping in Sassari, often going back to the city to stock up on basics. Many seasonal residents resent being ‘squeezed like lemons’ and view some shop-owners as dishonest. This sentiment is perhaps strongest amongst the Sassarese second home owners who see the huge price differential between Stintino and Sassari. For the Romans and the Milanese, prices perhaps compare favourably with those they are used to back home, or they are simply more resigned to being ‘squeezed’.

6.2. Agreeing and getting involved in local agendas

It is perhaps inevitable that a comune which sees its population increase by almost 27 fold in the summer months will endure a number of resource and price pressures. The key concern expressed by second home owners linked ‘stratospheric prices’ to generally poor services, of all types. But as well as bemoaning the cost of renting parasols on the Spiaggia in Concessione, the Sassarese second home owners shared a general concern for the lack of facilities for young people. Some of those interviewed, notably SUB4_M, SUB9_F and SUB2_F, had teenage (and nearly teenage) children. They were becoming concerned about the lack of evening social facilities for their offspring and feared, perhaps, that their children would become bored of the long holidays by the sea. The gap in services for the young, in Stintino itself rather than on the beaches, mirrors a demographic gap in the permanent population. ‘The percentage of young people is very low’: they now live and work in Sassari, leaving the town to their parents, who run the shops and restaurants and rent houses and apartments to tourists.

The owners from the mainland were mainly preoccupied with the quality and level of available services. SUB5_M (from Rome) and SUB6_F (from Naples) were principally concerned with medical provision. The 40,000 or so summer residents are served by a single dentist in Stintino, who is based in Sassari and travels to her surgery just a couple of times each week, and at other times only for emergencies. Similarly, there is a single medical centre for tourists at a second home development to the south of Stintino (at the ‘Country Paradise Village’) which is accessible only by car or an infrequent bus service, and which is closed for much of the day. In a serious medical emergency, patients need to be taken by car to the hospital at Sassari. This same concern was voiced by SUB3_F. For SUB5_M, the general low quality of services in Stintino, or all types, said something about the attitude of the comune and service providers towards tourists: they are a ‘resource to squeeze and not a resource to nurture’.

Stintino is also, according to SUB4_M, the ‘worst planned town in Italy’. It simply cannot cope with the volume of visitors and inadequate efforts have been made to retrofit the town for tourism. Connectivity to other settlements is poor; road junctions are badly designed and dangerous; the infrastructure is crumbling and not being renewed; and a long list of necessary ‘opere di urbanizzazione’ (urban works including improvement to pavements, pedestrian-only areas, cycle lanes and adequate parking) has been ignored for many years. Parking capacity and traffic control are perhaps two of the biggest challenges in the town. On most summer evenings, hundreds of cars clog the old town’s streets, competing fiercely for parking spaces. There are no evening bus services from the areas of purpose-built SHs to the north.

Those owners who have had reason to engage with the bureaucracy of Stintino highlighted some key reasons for this ‘chaos’. Stintino currently lacks a local plan (piano regolatore) or any commercial or tourism strategy. There is, overall, according to SUB4_M, no concerted effort on the part of the Stintinesi to organise themselves or work with others towards a resolution to the problems that the comune obviously faces. This situation, according to SUB7_M, has arisen because:

[... ] political power has been wielded by very few people over the last 15 years, who use it for their personal economic benefit. These benefits flow only to people who are ‘close’ to these personalities. Political decisions do not take into account the needs of tourists or second home owners. The majority of [permanent] residents are also excluded and do not benefit – or benefit only in a minimal way – from the wealth generated by taxing and squeezing second home owners.

SUB7_M points to a clique within the comune, but perhaps also to an opportunity to engage with a broader group of Stintino
residents, who sit outside of that clique, on issues of mutual concern. However, SUB1_F remained sceptical:

[...] after many years I have come to understand that it is hopeless to deal with [problems in Stintino] as an outsider. It is necessary for local people to decide to deal with them. The Stintinesi have too narrow a mentality to listen to suggestions or initiatives coming from us external tourists. I am rather hopeless and accept what I find because, in any case, I am sentimentally attached to this place.

The problems of Stintino provide the second home owners with a popular topic of conversation. They live with these problems throughout the summer, paying the high prices for parasols, feeling unable to cycle along narrow, badly-surfaced roads; trying to avoid tripping on the broken pavements; and circling the town for hours each evening in search of an elusive parking space. But there is little engagement with permanent residents on the impacts or remedies to these problems. A few of the owners had attended meetings in the comparit (neighbourhoods of purpose built SHs, outside the old town) where the owners of second homes had reached ‘unanimity’ on the problems faced. Some of those owners had been permanent residents who rent properties to holiday-makers. Whilst they had been less directly concerned with rising costs and with the many service and infrastructural problems highlighted by the seasonal residents, they acknowledged the impact these might eventual have on the attractiveness of the area. There was a shared concern for Stintino’s appeal as a tourist destination, even if the permanent residents continued to see tourists as a ‘resource to squeeze’ rather than to nurture.

6.3. Interactions, agreements and conflicts

Stintino is a holiday town and its permanent and seasonal residents are on different sides of the supply/demand equation. It is not a town in which second home owners comprise a small percentage of residents and try to ‘fit in’ or become accepted within the community. They are numerically dominant. This simple fact limits engagement and whilst, on the supply side, Stintino’s permanent residents wish to extract maximum profit from its seasonal economy during the summer months, on the demand side, the second home owners are looking for greater investment in services and a calming of prices. Investment in services (aimed at enhancing the tourist experience and, ultimately, the wellbeing of all) would seem to be an area of mutual interest, although prices seem destined to reflect high seasonal demand in a context of constrained supply.

Few actions have been taken in response to these challenges. There are some ongoing battles over water supply and infrastructure maintenance. Frustrations over the claimed unwillingness of the comune to engage positively with second home owners on these issues has resulted in a case being taken to the Regional Administrative Tribunal (or TAR, Tribunale Amministrativo Regionale) in Cagliari. Similar concerns over lighting and road safety have resulted in legal representations to the comune. And many second home owners have challenged the comune’s refusal to grant a 50% discount on service charges for waste collection, which is the norm throughout Sardinia where frazioni comprise just purpose-built SHs, occupied for only short periods. Interaction between owners of second homes and those ‘personalities’ who wield political power has been generally contentious; interaction between those same owners and the majority of Stintinesi has been better, but confined to one of client-provider. Second home owners, even those with deep family roots in Stintino, seem to play the part of customers. There is a sense that Stintino is more of a business than a community.

In some instances, family links remain and generate greater connectivity; and that connectivity is sometimes to people with skills that could be used to deliver positive benefits. SUB5_M’s observed concentration of political power has been challenged by SUB4_M, who has sought to ‘safeguard specific people’s [legal] rights’ and by SUB7_M, who preferred not to say exactly what use he had made of his own legal knowledge. In the case of SUB4_M, this generally involved offering informal legal advice on what neighbours might and might not be able to do with their own homes, in order to rent them out to seasonal visitors or modify them in other ways. But on the admission of both, their actions have supported individuals rather than the community as a whole; individuals who were not necessarily permanent residents and who were often family members. Building on the characterisation of Stintino as a business, it is divided into three clear groups: the political elite, who manage the business for their own benefit; the general population, on the shop floor; and the clients who consume what Stintino has to offer during the ferie. It appears from the interviews that the customers and managers are often at loggerheads; the customers and workers, however, seem to have more closely aligned interests and neither are getting the best deal from Stintino’s development. To date, however, there has been little movement towards any joint resolution. A conversation is underway in the comparit and between neighbours in the old town and there are some indications of shared frustrations – with the physical state of the town, with the quality of services, and with decision-making – but momentum seems not to have built behind any particular actions.

7. Reflections and conclusions

Second homes have a clear social value in rural, or coastal, communities. They introduce bridging social capital and enhance a community’s capacity to deal with key socio-economic challenges. These were the hypotheses presented at the beginning of this paper. To what extent have they been proven correct? Stintino is a very particular and single case. Around 80% of all single family homes or apartments on the peninsula are purpose-built SHs. Stintino old town is the hub of an important holiday destination in the Mediterranean. It has everything – the climate, beaches, unspoilt nature (on the Asinara), food and water-sports – that tourists look for; and they flock to Stintino in huge numbers every year. The town is overwhelmed. Its infrastructure struggles to cope, and its residents extract what they can as quickly as they can from the tourists before they leave in the first or second weeks of September. Stintino is a tourist economy with a town rather than a town with a tourist economy. It can outwardly appear to be more of a business than a community. But this was not always the case. Before the 1960s, the tuna fishing industry that had been transferred to Stintino in the 1880s was the mainstay of the economy. It supported a vibrant community that saw relatively few visitors. But as that industry declined, the town experienced rapid depopulation. The younger generation drifted to nearby Sassari. And it was in Sassari where they settled and had families. Those families now view Stintino effectively as a seaside extension of the city and as part of their collective inheritance and heritage. They are non-resident locals who stake or re-stake their claim to the town by renouncing former family homes where they can or by buying purpose-built SHs closer to the beaches. For some owners, Stintino is a distant ‘vacation space’ with which their association is incidental, but for others it is a nearby ‘leisure space’ (Petersson, 1999) in which they are asserting a familial connection.

The hypothesis offered in this paper relied on there being a ‘host community’ with which second home owners might interact. But the reality is that Stintino comprises multiple communities, both
resident and non-resident. The clearest division amongst the 1500 permanent *Stintinesi* is between those who control much of the economic activity (the handful of ‘personalities’ who own the majority of successful businesses, operate the *Spiagge in Concessione*, and wield political power) and those who benefit in a more modest way from seasonal employment. Amongst the non-permanent residents (and excluding the day-visitor), there seem to be divisions of distance from local people, beginning with the Stintino emigrés and moving through other connected (or non-connected) Sassarese, connected (or non-connected) Sardinians and Italians, and ending with the foreign owners who were not encountered in this study. The interviewed group comprised emigrés within a social network of Sassarese and Italians.

The analysis presented in this paper attempted to answer five questions, drawing evidence from in-depth interviews with second home owners. The degree to which it was able to ‘map’ relationships was limited, given its sole focus on second home owners. For that reason, the case study needs to be seen as exploratory, highlighting the potential of ‘outsiders’ to connect with permanent residents in a variety of ways and thereby increase the diversity of social capital in host communities, possibly delivering a ‘resource potential’ for those communities. Despite the exploratory nature of the study, the following answers to the five questions can be drawn from the analysis:

1. Second home owners as incidental bridges to extra local resources

Were second home owners instrumental in helping build social capital? Some had the potential to act as bridges to extra local resources: they brought new skills to the community. There was some overlap in interests with the ‘local’ owners of holiday lets and a desire to ensure that the area retained its appeal to holiday-makers. This resulted in a degree of consensus around the need to deal with various infrastructure issues, including the condition of roads, paving, lighting and water supply. At least one of the owners was involved in the asserting of rights, and legal knowledge has been used to challenge the inert response of the comune to some of these shared concerns. However, evidence of enhanced social capital was light. It was more of a potential than a reality. The second home owners possessed a range of skills. Within the interviewed group, various legal and public sector perspectives were offered on the problems of Stintino, but actions had seldom been taken that challenged the status quo or sought benefits for the wider community.

2. Connectivity to multiple networks and the kinds of bridges built

It seemed that only fragile bridges to professional worlds were built and these tended to rely on familial connection. A local political elite in the town had already ‘got ahead’ and had become wealthy from tourism. In that respect, Stintino differs greatly from more isolated rural communities, with fragile economies, that might reap benefits from greater external connectivity. The town gained its political independence from Sassari in 1988, and since then has grown its tourist economy to the benefit of those who control its resources. It is difficult to see what the local elite might have to gain from the seasonal residents, above that which is already extracted through commercial transactions. In general, there are few bridges and, where these exist, they connect to family and friends living permanently in the old town rather than the community as a whole (through any governance infrastructure). Reliance on family ties suggests that resource potential in this study is delivered through *strong links* rather than Granovetter’s (1973) weak ties. There is some truth in this. The interest that some second home owners had in Stintino stemmed from their inheritance of property and their blood relationships with ‘distant cousins’, but they nevertheless occupied a position ‘between’ the immediate social networks of Stintino and the privileged knowledge networks that seemed to be centred on the professional worlds of Sassari. Although the bridges were found to be fragile they were nonetheless seasonal bridges rather than constant strong links.

3. Connection or disconnection from immediate neighbours

In instances where potential bridges exist (seasonal residents are getting together to challenge patterns of service provision and investment), the weight of evidence pointed to these being ‘autonomous’ with SH owners acting in their own private interests, rather than in any broader community interest — except in instances where interests overlap with the local owners of holiday lets, as indicated above. Owners were lobbying on planning and service issues, appealing for assistance and arbitration from the Regional Administrative Tribunal in Cagliari. Certainly, those owners not resigned to the status quo, displayed a tendency to act on issues rather than with the community, but this was because they had property in the outlying frazioni, well away from the permanent population in the old town. Only SUB4_M’s concerns seemed to chime with some of his immediate neighbours; concerns over parking and the administration of building regulations (e.g. making structural changes and the application of standards and rules). He displayed a willingness to work with those neighbours in particular instances where it was felt that rights were being threatened, and there appeared to be some alignment of interests (both he and his neighbours were looking to rent out property).

4. Misalignment or alignment with local agendas

Is there misalignment in cultures and does the presence of large numbers of second homes on the peninsula result in transformative pressures on the local population? The reality in Stintino is that a major cultural shift occurred 50 years ago. Since the decline of commercial fishing, the population has embraced tourism as its sole source of income. Although the tuna fishing legacy is important (it has a museum dedicated to it in the old town) tourism has replaced it as a key cultural driver. Stintino seems not to be culturally sensitive and it would be difficult to argue that the swelling of its seasonal population is a threat to the social fabric. Rather, that fabric is sustained by tourism. The demands of tourists — reflecting their values, tastes and dispositions (elements of their *habitus*) — may sometimes be misaligned with those of permanent residents, but that is because they are in Stintino for different reasons.

5. Conflict with local culture/agendas or agreement around shared concerns

There was little sense that the owners of second homes wished to fundamentally change — or ‘transform’ — what Stintino is; they are there because of what it is and what it has to offer. Some regretted what they saw as over-development, and it is likely that some permanent residents share that regret. But the town and the wider peninsular has been transformed as a result of the supply/demand relationship between permanent and seasonal residents over several decades. No strongly conservative ethic has been imported into the area with second homes owners. There is a shared acceptance of what Stintino has become.

However, it is interesting to note that whilst SUB5_M (from the mainland) commented on the environmental damage wrought by
tourism, SUB4_M (from Sassari, and with his deep roots in Stintino) seemed keen to help others exploit the potential of their homes as holiday lets. Greater connectivity to the place perhaps led to greater acceptance of economic change and the importance of local people being able to benefit from the prosperity that tourism has brought to the peninsula. Doubtless, second homes are a hugely important economic resource in Stintino. They create wealth for those local people who own and let them, and they bring a sustained number of visitors to the area each summer. Some local people have benefited more than others from the economic transformation that has enveloped the town in recent decades and there are at least some indications that Stintino émigrés are inclined to use their networks and skills, which represents a clear extra-local resource, to the benefit of those who have thus far extracted less from Stintino’s economic growth. But whilst the study has been able to highlight possible instances of social benefit, born of personal interaction and access to bridged social capital, Stintino is a town that appears to have reaped greater economic than social benefits from seasonal SHs; albeit benefits that have been unevenly distributed.

What broader conclusions might be drawn from this single case? It seems clear that bridges — across which social capital may flow — need to have strong foundations within a recipient community; they need a degree of embeddedness to be useful and to present those communities with the resource potential hypothesised in this paper. In Stintino, this embeddedness came from family connection. But equally, it might derive from participatory structures that bring permanent and seasonal residents together around common interests. Such structures were either lacking or highly localised in this case study. The potential for bridging may be grasped in other places through different local fora or community governance apparatus which make space for external interests and inputs. However, the existence of such things is often itself indicative of strong bonding capital within a community, as well as agreement around the need to engage those external interests. Whilst second home owners may have something positive to offer host communities in some instances, prevailing community dynamics will play a part in determining whether there is translation from potential to actual resource, as will different attitudes in different places to the extraneous threat that second homes are sometimes seen to represent.

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References


