

Promoting regenerative sustainability to second homeowners

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Abstract

Second homes are essential components in the Danish tourism accommodation provision, and their role in the achievement of more sustainable tourism futures constitutes a key policy concern. This research contribution assesses the ideas of regenerative tourism and the contexts for the persuasive communication of environmental action to second homeowners. Ingredients in sustainability campaigns can be designed to reflect how second homeowners interpret environmental risk and potential. Governmental and tourism agencies' promotion of sustainability to second homeowners need to reflect the receptive manners of the owners, and feasible approaches are discussed under: 1) cognitive, 2) experiential, 3) normative, and 4) reciprocal styles. The concept of regenerative tourism is new in tourism research, and this contribution unfolds communication and marketing aspects in a field where property ownership and touristic behavior is critically and paradoxically intermingled.

Key words

Regenerative tourism; Communication; Sustainability promotion.

Track

Tourism Marketing

1. Introduction

Denmark's 200.000 second homes represent an essential tourism infrastructure, serving both as recreational resources for the owners, but also as commercially marketed rented facilities that attract and accommodate for a large proportion of tourists in the coastal areas. However, second homes lack behind in terms of terms of transition towards modern and sustainable building formats and landscaping practice. Taking into account the present energy crisis and also changed behaviors towards use of second homes around the seasons, the inadequate standards of the energy consumption, freshwater and wastewater resilience, flooding protection, biodiversity maintenance, etc tend to be counterproductive to immediate environmental as well as long-term goals. A lack of attention to sustainability does not sustain second homes as a main argument for environmentally friendly Danish tourism.

Second homeowners can be regarded as tourists in the sense that they are dislocated from their primary place of residence. They and their relatives and friends who utilize the facilities with them are not targets of standard tourism marketing and information, as they are embedded in and supposedly frequent visitors to the destination. The type of information that is directed to tourists about the environmental status of a destination may be of little relevance for second homeowners, as their investment has been undertaken, and they will not easily shift to other locations. Therefore, labels as "green destination" or similar can be of little importance for the specific holiday choice and behavior of second homeowners. Likewise, if a destination is scandalized by negative events, for example a degradation of biodiversity or the spill of environmentally hazardous substances, second homeowners may choose to react passively, wait for it to be over again.

This implies that the communication with homeowners and the promotion of sustainability measures need to be undertaken with different means and models than what is applied in the case of "normal" tourists, who do not own the facilities. If they like, "normal" tourists are in a position where they can decide to visit another place, which addresses their attention to environmental matters in more adequate ways.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the modes of promoting sustainable measures, measures that may stimulate and convince second homeowners to undertake building and landscape changes with sustainable connotations. Climate challenges and

environmental risks demand efforts from all segments of society, and tourism – including the second home sector – is expected to proceed towards this agenda.

The paper attempts to close a gap in the knowledge about communication in sustainable tourism, as it shifts focus away from the obvious categories of tourists and consumer choices towards types of tourists who are assumed to be:

- Less affected by types of communication that invoke rapid response and immediate shifts in behavior and attention.
- More affected by types of communication that appeal to long-term values combined in the concern for both space attraction, convenience, and return of property investments.
- Modified by layers of community opinion and functionality of whatever collaborative alliances and social and emotional associative connections they have to the specific place and space.

This study works with the integration of these particularities of the second home sector, and thereby it strives to create more nuances in the understanding of the promotional alleys for sustainable tourism.

2. Literature Review

The second home sector has a long history in tourism research, and many aspects have been scrutinized, such as for example attraction values, demographic patterns, gentrification, local impacts, and seasonality (Hall, 2015; Hall & Müller, 2018; Müller, 2021; Paris, 2009). However, only in more recent years, environmental aspects have been added to the list (Hoogendoorn, & Fitchett, 2018; Steffansen, Xue, Stefansdottir, & Næss, 2022; Xue, Næss, Stefansdottir, Steffansen, & Richardson, 2022).

Mobility is a main issue addressed, as the net climate footprint of the second homes is significantly connected to transportation in private cars from places of residence (often urban agglomerations) to the place of the second homes (often in the peripheries).

Implicitly, second homes are assumed to be holiday forms that invite for a lifestyle that put only little pressure on the environment: much outdoor life, slower and relaxed activities, nurturing of social relations rather than heavyweight consumptive activities (Larsen, 2014). However, second homes have approached the technical standards of primary homes, for example with washing machines, full kitchen electric equipment, spas, pools, and saunas. Leisure lifestyles resemble everyday practices, and TV, computers, games, and mobile communication are not necessarily limited during second home holidays.

Wider, the use of the second homes is expanded to a still longer period of the year, and in many countries this development has already increased and will dramatically increase energy consumption for heating and/or cooling purposes (Zogal, Domenech, & Emekli, 2022).

Depending on the place specific vulnerability of flora and fauna, larger numbers of visitors during longer periods of the year can lead to the degradation of such natural resources and amenity values constitute the main argument for tourism in the first place. Insufficient sewage handling is one such issue of concern (Hiltunen, Pitkänen, & Halseth, 2016).

Sustainability communication to tourists is very closely interlinked with tourism promotion and marketing. Sustainable measures provided by the single tourism facility or destination is widely seen, and the effect of such marketing and promotion on tourists' perception and behavior is also a main area of academic interest (Font, & McCabe, 2019; Han, 2021). There are also numerous studies of sustainable business strategies, and there is an increasingly profound understanding of how, why, and when enterprises address sustainability challenges (Coles, Warren, Borden, & Dinan, 2017). The second homeowners are not tourists in the regular way, and they are not either tourism facility providers in the usual (business) sense. They are somewhere between or in a position beyond. There is very little insight into what moves them towards or away from sustainable behaviors when it comes to the property that they possess.

Sustainability models for tourism development are numerous, and in this context an evolution into ideas of "regenerative tourism" is particularly relevant. Regenerative tourism is "a transformational approach that aims to fulfil the potential of tourism places to flourish and create net positive effects through increasing regenerative capacity of human societies and ecosystems" (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, & Nygaard, 2022, p. 9). Bellato et al (2022) characterize the sustainable tourism approach as fairly instrumental, mechanic, and top-down, while the regenerative approach is co-created with any user and reflect the specific places and locational outsprings. Sustainable tourism is about limiting the potential environmental damage, and in contrast hereto regenerative tourism strives to create a net surplus of effects and thereby add to the continuous resilience of tourism in a constant reciprocal dialogue.

Governance agency is essential for the progression towards sustainability achievements. In regenerative tourism the governance landscape is to be modified and re-installed in many regards in order to invigorate the powers of tourists and local communities in which tourism is embedded (Becken & Kaur, 2022). There is not one single way, but many, and they are complex and inmingled. Fuzziness is perhaps a feature of regenerative tourism

approach, and it may appeal to actions beyond standard and immediately measurable ones. The regenerative approach can inspire research endeavors in areas where change depends on the interaction between people, and where governance innovations rely on the ability to ensure flexible measures, considering the speed of action and changes in commitment, the reciprocal dimension.

Becken & Kaur (2022) nail the communication modes in their change models towards sustainable mode. In “traditional tourism” the knowledgeable elite is disproportionately in possession of communicative powers, and they influence by convincing or demanding. In the mainstream “sustainable tourism” model, the participatory element is more pronounced, and the stakeholders are asked to give feedback, based on the information that they get. The “regeneration tourism” invites a more distributed and networked communication, where everybody has a voice on a continual base. A stable consensus is not necessarily established, but new elements of communication move agendas subtly forward. Communication and promotion are matters of talking with the tourists, rather than talking to the tourists (Liburd, Nielsen, & Heape, 2017), and in regenerative tourism this philosophy is taken to new heights.

There is a plentitude of communication models and methods for the promotion of sustainable tourism. Referring to the notions of regenerative tourism, this research takes its start with the holistic and psychology inspired approach introduced by van der Linden (2014). He distinguishes effectively between three successive (public) communication campaigns for sustainable tourism: 1) cognitive-analytical, 2) affective-experiential, and 3) “social-normative”. It is, however, to be investigated here whether van der Linden’s model needs a twist and expansion when working in the muddled field of (regenerative) second home tourism, critically decisive when focus is on the second homeowners.

3. Research Approach

This paper is part of an ongoing research endeavor undertaken in collaboration with selected Danish municipalities, DMOs, tourism actors, and planning professionals. The main agenda is to investigate barriers and opportunities for a long-term sustainability improvement in second home zones. In Danish planning regulation and building register, second homes have their own well-defined code. The majority of second homes are located in areas that are dedicated for this purpose. These features are critical not only for the promotion of sustainability measures in the regenerative sense that the second homes are assembled in zones, but also for any communicative endeavors and stakeholder involvement.

Sustainability measures are here mainly connected to individually owned land sites and buildings and excludes planning and initiatives for surrounding infrastructure and nature areas. Accordingly, the study addresses first and foremost land plots where each second homeowner has a principal (but not necessarily undisputed) power of decision.

Data for the study is collected through secondary data i.e., planning documents, media publications, etc. In addition, there have been interviews with planning and tourism policy staff from municipalities. Guided observations in selected second home areas have supplemented the data. Planning and sustainability professionals attached to the project have had an importance in the outlining of types of communication and distributed dialogue, and they have augmented the argumentation concerning the communication models. The research work is ongoing, and the evidence will be enhanced for the presentation in a longer research article. A first step of sustaining and developing the model is the principal contribution here.

4. Sustainable Second Home Development

Moving a second home towards a more sustainable status can embrace numerous specific actions and investments. Some of the most urgent and/or feasible discussed presently in the Danish context are:

- Energy savings obtained through investment in building improvements such as insulation, double glazing etc, and installment of solar panels and other captive tools, that may entirely replace energy consumption from the grid.
- Energy and water savings by investments in more efficient household tools and machinery, and/or ensuring lifestyle changes that replaces indoor life with outdoor or less consumptive pleasures.
- Rewilding open space and creating opportunities of a more biodiverse flora and fauna. It may embrace using space to grow food to the household, within the regenerative mindset to “give more back than you take”.
- Prolonging the lifespan of building materials and practicing creative recycling and upcycling. This also includes the use of new (short traveled) building materials with relevant sustainability and lifecycle assessment certification.

The second homeowners’ motivation and commitment to sustainable reorganization of buildings and land sites vary considerably, and there are also counteractive developments.

The possibility to ensure an income through renting leads to counterproductive behaviors of

second homeowners, for example investing in pools, spas, electric equipment, building materials of plastics, paved garden surfaces, use of pesticides, etc.

5. Promotion in the Regenerative Context

Second homeowners are individuals who are likely to be receptive of different communication approaches from governmental bodies and tourism agencies. Van der Linden (2014) establishes a useful model for the (governmental) communication of climate change in tourism context, and this model is here applied and supplemented with the regenerative element.

The original model suggests an evolutionary development in the persuasion styles: First, the “cognitive-analytical reasoning” approach, which is consistent with the traditional knowledge-attitude-behavior model, assuming that more and substantiated facts will motivate people to act in concordance with the suggested “best-practice”. Second, the “affective-experiential processing” type, framed as an appeal to the risk-as-feeling, and where change is ensured by imposing fear and guilt. Third, the “social-normative influences” type, where social norms and peer assessment shapes behavior, and the exposure of norms of behavior or misbehavior is communicated top-down and spread to or via trendsetting fora (van der Linden, 2014).

In the context of the embryonic regenerative tourism discussion, there is a need to supplement the model with a fourth type, the “regenerative-involving”, which stimulates the self-action and the creation of meaning in the micro-context. It lies logically in continuation of the social-normative type, as it not also understands the human as socially affectable. However, the regenerative-involving model emphasizes the idea of the individual as someone who consistently creates and adapts his/her own approaches, and who may go beyond the opinions of the crowd. As underpinned by Becken & Kaur (2022), humans recognize and interpret the dynamics and the boundaries of the biosphere and act and work in reciprocity and respect for the complex natural-social-cultural environment. The human being, in this case second homeowners, learning from their environment, interact and offer their modes of solutions into – or beyond - the communicative frameworks that governmental bodies or touristic agencies are providing.

Based on insights from desk research, interviews and interventions with municipal planning representative and tourism actors, communication measures in the realm of these four persuasive manners are expressed below.

Within the cognitive-analytical model, the second homeowner will be approached with information packages that underline the cost-effectiveness of investments in for example energy improvements. The reasoning is embedded in building and planning regulations, where the second homeowner, in case of changes of the property, must comply with more sustainable practices. Tourism bodies argue that better building standards – with adequate labels and certification - will increase the possibility to generate income through renting. The economic argumentation has, as it is observed here, a particular weight, while benefits for the environment are subdued.

Affective-experimental manners of communication appeal to the risk-response of second homeowners. Many second homes are in risk of flooding (authors, 2022, removed during review), and communication may be of warning nature, for example providing projective and interactive flooding mapping, where the second homeowners can assess the risks of storm and flooding events and in time take measures. The media are alert in cases of loss of property, and the authorities' response is confined to referring to overall climate change policies and specific planning documents. In case of conflicting interests (Hjalager, 2020), sometime hostile protest voices are raised, and information (also misinterpretations) hit the media.

Social-normative communication in the second home context is mediated on many platforms, some also accessible to governmental and tourism bodies. Local associations of second homeowners operate Facebook groups, and sustainability practices are sometimes publicized and discussed. Communication from public or semipublic organizations is often channeled through the associations. Renting platform enterprises possess a substantial communicative power, although sustainability agendas are usually not well-communicated. These years, there is a rising interest in establishing experimental building examples for leisure purpose, and philanthropic funds are ready to support. Prototypes of sustainable second homes and the efficient communication about them on a variety of platforms may be a factor in a turn-around in the social-normative communication.

The regeneration-involving mode of communication remains still to be unfolding, both in practice and in academic research. Co-creative “giving-back” to nature does appeal to some groups and alert municipality action and communication. An example is the publishing and promotion of a pamphlet of biodiversity measures for the inspiration of individual second homeowners. Second homeowners may come together and investigate specific biodiversity barriers in their area. Groups are combatting invasive species on their own land sites and on common space, and this endeavor is forming the basis of practice and regenerative collaboration. The establishment of building material swaps pools and the sharing of garden and

leisure equipment are discussed, but rarely implemented. In “hip” second home areas the press is attentive to and report about trends shifts of this type.

6. Conclusion and Perspectives

The purpose of this contrition is to address ideas and conceptualizations of regenerative tourism, using and expanding the known model of persuasive communication strategies. Ongoing research on this topic suggests that, in Denmark, communication to second homeowners about sustainability prospects is scarce, and that persuasion tactics mainly assume that the recipients are responsible to facts, data, and evidence, the cognitive-analytical mode. The social fabric of the second home areas is loose, and fully embodied communication according hereto is confined to first-mover areas with some celebrity status. Communication to risks and fears works best when second homeowners’ pecuniary interest are threatened, and protests against and demands to the authorities to control for example flooding risks are forwarded. The regenerative perspective, where an involvement takes place along with the reconciling of new strands of “meaning” is only marginally emerging, pushed forward not necessarily by communities of second homeowners, but rather by (semi)philanthropic bodies that have the powers of investment and the capabilities of orchestrating meaningful communication channels for anyone who might wish to express and state a new sustainable practice.

After a long period of limited research attention, second home is a touristic format under alteration, demanding new approaches in tourism marketing and communication inquiry.

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