

# Peace and quiet beyond the border: The trans-border mobility of Russian second home owners in Finland

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## Abstract

Russian second home purchases in Finland have grown rapidly since 2000, and have been the source of a contested social debate. This study represents the first investigation of Russian second home ownership in Finland. The aim is to investigate how Russian trans-border second home mobility is produced (its elements and trajectories), challenged, and what are its socio-economic and spatial outcomes at the local and regional levels. The phenomenon is approached theoretically applying the concepts of constellations of mobility and mobility regime. While these theoretical approaches have been used to address leisure mobilities that originate in the West, Russian second home ownership in Finland represents a different mobility pattern, from East to West. The findings emphasise the increasing role of the border in the production and practice, as well as in the outcomes of such mobility. This study shows that the perceived outcome of Russian ownership presented through the social debate has been detached from the actual phenomenon. The empirical part of the dissertation – four research papers – uncovers the driving factors in Russian second home mobility, its challenges, and its socio-economic and spatial outcome, which collectively help address the social debate and inform policy makers. Simultaneously, the empirical study re-interprets Western mobility approaches in relation to Russian trans-border mobility and reveals peculiarities of the East-to-West mobility trajectory.

*Keywords: second homes, trans-border mobility, Russians, Finland*

Second home ownership in Finland has become a popular trend among Russians since 2000. Currently, Russians comprise the biggest group of foreign second home owners in Finland. Russians purchased 4424 properties in Finland from 2000 to 2015, which is nearly twice the amount of all other foreign purchases for the same time period.

Despite the general acceptance by and welcoming attitudes of Finns towards Russian tourists and the development of border areas to satisfy their needs, Russian second home owners are treated differently. They have become a contested subject in public and parliamentary debates. Russian second home owners comprise a special category of tourists in Finland in terms of motivations, visits, community involvement and Finnish perceptions of them. Foreign owners, however, have not been studied in Finland before, and this study is the first extensive study on Russian second home ownership in Finland.

The focus of this dissertation is on trans-border second home mobility and, more precisely, on Russian second home ownership in Finland (Hannonen, 2016). The internationalisation of second home ownership and trans-border second home mobility are a growing trend in different parts of the world. The majority of studies, however, come from the West with Westerners primarily acting as customers on the international second home market. The research case of Russian second home mobility to Finland along the East-to-West continuum deviates from the established (Western) viewpoints on leisure and mobility patterns. Moreover, the increasing presence of foreign second home owners in rural areas brings a number of socio-economic and spatial changes to local communities. Thus, the aim of this work is to reveal the way that East-to-West trans-border second home mobility is produced (its elements and trajectories), challenged, and its socio-economic and spatial outcomes at the local level. Addressing these issues also reveals the basic features of East-to-West second home mobility. The production of mobility means both subjective and objective factors. Subjective or personal factors predominantly concern motivations, perceptions and personal affective reasons for trans-border property ownership; while objective ones are those external factors that affect such mobility, like legislation, border and visa regimes, connectivity between places, etc.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the motives for Russian trans-border second home mobility?
2. What is the role of the border in Russian trans-border second home mobility?
3. How does trans-border second home mobility resonate at the local community level?
4. How are Russian second homes regionally distributed and which factors influence their distributional patterns?

Each research question is addressed in an individual research paper that have formed the empirical part of the dissertation.

The study was carried out in the most popular region for Russian property purchases, the Savonlinna region and the region of South Savo in Eastern Finland. The data for the dissertation consists of three parts. The first part consisted of interviews with Russian second home owners (N=25) from the Savonlinna region in the region of South Savo in Eastern Finland. The interviews were collected during the summer and early autumn 2010. There was no selection technique for respondents as all participants, who had been reached one way or another, were interviewed. Second part consisted of questionnaires with Finnish local inhabitants (N=186) and second home owners (N=308) from the same region. The questionnaires were conducted

in summer 2010. Third part consisted of coordinates on Russian second home locations in the region of South Savo in the period 2003–2012 that were supported by other geographical databases that provided information on housing, residential areas, and terrain. The diversity of data and methods of data collection and analyses provided an excellent opportunity to study the phenomenon from different perspectives. Selected methods and collected data allowed to implement the triangulation technique to study the importance of second home location for Russian owners and collect opinions of two groups of respondents through the survey.

The empirical part of the dissertation consists of four research papers. The first paper concerns the production of trans-border second home mobilities (Lipkina, 2013). It focuses on Russian motives for second home ownership and location in Finland. The results show that the underlying motivations of second home purchase become more complex when applied to a trans-border context. Russians' motives are culturally driven, and influenced by the image of and previous experiences in Finland. Among the main motives are safety, both in term of physical safety and safety of investment, natural amenities, lower property prices and lakeshore ownership, which is restricted in Russia by law. Second home tourism is a culturally embedded practice among Russians, but the decision to purchase a second home abroad is driven by differences in cultural, political and leisure conditions between Finland and Russia. Safety is a novel motive for second home ownership that has not been reported by other studies on trans-border and international second home ownership. Moreover, Russian second homes in Finland are not significantly dependent on time and distance. Only the location of a second home from the border on the Finnish side is distance sensitive, not the overall trip from the primary residence. Ultimately, the particular location of Russian second homes in Finland is the result of offers from real estate agents.

The second paper investigates the role of the border in trans-border second home ownership (Hannonen, Tuulentie, & Pitkänen, 2015). The relationship between trans-border second home tourism and the border has not received much academic attention. The border is, however, an essential component of second home ownership abroad: it is constantly crossed on the way to and from a second home, it marks the different regulations and norms that exist on either side, and it imposes restrictions that shape mobility across it. The findings show that despite strict border regimes and border formalities, the invisible barriers (socio-cultural and linguistic differences) are perceived by Russian second home owners as the most challenging. They influence second home owners' leisure practices in Finland leading to the formation of mediator-practices to fulfil their needs. In addition to the barrier function of the border, it appears to be an opportunity for better leisure conditions, safety or lower property prices. Russian second home ownership in Finland is the result of the very presence of the border due to the opportunities that are provided and safeguarded across the border. These opportunities outweigh the barrier function of the border.

The third paper demonstrates one of the socio-economic outcomes of trans-border second home mobility from a community perspective: the level of community involvement of Russian owners, and their potential for economic impact (Lipkina & Hall, 2013). The paper brings together both sides of community inhabitants, Russians and Finns, and demonstrates their opin-

ions towards and expectations of each other. Language and cultural barriers appear to be the major obstacles for active community involvement by Russian owners. Unlike lifestyle migrants in mature destinations, Russians do not socialise with fellow nationals and generally have very limited social contacts in Finland. Russian owners, however, desire to be better integrated. While the use of basic services is manageable by Russians, the demand in specialised services leads to the formation of an unofficial personal network of help from neighbours or house builders. The economic impact of foreign owners remains below their potential due to limited knowledge about the locality. This relegates the economic contribution of foreign second home owners to their initial investment and compulsory monthly payments to the local economy. Such limited socio-economic involvement in the local community is accompanied by a low level of acceptance from the receiving community. The majority of Finnish respondents in the region do not want to have contact with Russian owners and have unfavourable views of Russian potential for community development. The study demonstrates the opposite expectations and attitudes of Finns and Russians towards each other, as well as the absence of knowledge about these contrasting attitudes.

The fourth paper studies the spatial outcome of trans-border second home ownership: the factors for property location, and the interrelation between the critical social debate on Russian property locations and the distribution of Russian properties in the region of South Savo (Hannonen, Lehtonen, & Toivakka, 2016). The results provide a wider array of factors for property distribution than those presented in public debates. The location and types of Russian recreational properties are affected by a number of factors. First, distance to and accessibility of a destination are the most important issues that directly impact the distribution of recreational properties. Thus, Russian second homes are predominantly found in the more accessible border regions of two neighbouring countries. Second, the amenities of a destination, a lakeside location in this case, is another important factor. Third, the presence of services is also a significant component in trans-border second home ownership, as owners are limited in the amount of goods they may import due to border regulations. Moreover, the particular location of a second home is often the result of offers from a real estate agent, especially in the case of a foreign property purchase. Any of these factors or a combination of them can lead to concentrations of foreign properties in particular areas. Consequently, Russian purchases have generally been dominant in the eastern part of South Savo over the last few years.

Mobility is an overarching theoretical approach in the dissertation (Urry, 2007). To better understand trans-border second home mobilities the concept of “constellations of mobility” (Cresswell, 2010) and “mobility regime” (Shamir, 2005) have been employed. Russians’ ownership in Finland is an example of an incongruous tourism pattern from the Western perspective. While juxtaposing the phenomenon in question with the existing examples from the West and applying elaborated frameworks to understand motives, borders, participation and outcome, Russian trans-border second home ownership shows a number of inconsistencies in motivations, trajectories and the very presence of the border. Thus, the theoretical approaches to mobility, which are based on case studies from the West and characterised by West-to-East flows, are reinterpreted within the new context of East-to-West mobility using the example of Russian

second home mobility to Finland. In order to enhance the understanding of East-to-West mobility, this study on Russian second home ownership in Finland approaches the phenomenon from different perspectives (owners, locals, as well as geospatial characteristics) using mixed methods (Hannonen, 2016).

The findings show that one of the characteristics of East-to-West mobility is the ability to overcome great physical, economic and cultural distances to secure desirable leisure conditions abroad. A secure investment and a safe leisure environment emphasise the importance of the border and its restrictive formalities as a guarantor of safe havens in this type of mobility flow. Simultaneously, the socio-cultural distance to the other side of the border produces a network of mediators and very limited social contacts. The empirical and theoretical parts of this dissertation represent an attempt to explain and theorise trans-border second home mobility as a new type of East-to-West leisure mobility.

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