Between traditional lifestyle and late modern leisure: young second-home dwellers’ perspectives on Finnish cottage culture

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ABSTRACT
Young people have rarely been studied in the field of second-home research as active subjects, although they play an influential part in contemporary second-home tourism. Based on semi-structured interviews, this study seeks to address the scholarly gap in the existing literature by analysing the experiences of, and attitudes towards, second-home living among 12- to 17-year-old second-home dwellers vacationing in Mäntyharju, Finland. The study focuses on the second-home environment as a hybrid space enabling young cottagers to combine elements of a traditionalist lifestyle, outdoor recreation, and late modern technoscape in pursuit of pleasurable and restorative leisure. The findings suggest that young second-home dwellers see outdoor activities and rich natural surroundings, as well as intense familial communality and selected aspects of simple living, as the basis of an enjoyable second-home experience. At the same time, they complement these elements with the active use of mobile and entertainment technology, seeking a satisfying balance between the exotic and the ordinary. The results show that studying young second-home dwellers offers fresh new perspectives not only on second-home tourism and its ongoing changes but also on the leisure preferences of late modern youth in general.

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Introduction
In Finland, young people’s attitudes towards second-home vacationing are a recurrent topic of public discussion (e.g. Pitkänen et al., 2014; Pitkänen & Vepsäläinen, 2008; Stran- dell et al., 2020). The theme, as such, is not a novel one, but it has recently been met with increasing concern caused by the ageing of current second-home owners and the uncertainty about the young generation’s willingness to carry on the tradition of rural cottage living (Pitkänen et al., 2014; Strandell et al., 2020). For Finns, the continuation of domestic second-home tourism is a question of major cultural, social and economic importance (e.g. Hiltunen et al., 2013). Finland has been described as a promised land of second-
home dwelling (Adamiak et al., 2015), and many Finns consider second-home vacationing an essential part of the Finnish lifestyle (Hiltunen et al., 2013; Peräinen, 2006). Finnish cottage culture also lacks many of the elitist aspects attached to second-home living, especially outside Scandinavia (Hall & Müller, 2004; Hiltunen et al., 2013). The national count of second homes already exceeds half a million, and over 40 per cent of the 5.5 million Finns have been estimated to visit second homes regularly (Pitkänen, Lehtimäki, et al., 2020). This makes them highly active second-home owners and dwellers, even from a global perspective (Adamiak et al., 2015; Hiltunen et al., 2013). National surveys also show that, despite the popular concern that the practice is waning, second-home vacationing has remained a common activity among youth. A survey conducted in 2009–2010 (Sievänen & Neuvonen, 2011) revealed that 68 per cent of 15- to 24-year-old Finns had visited a cottage within the preceding 12 months, with a median of 10 days spent at the second home. Moreover, the results indicated a slight increase in second-home activity among young people.

Interestingly, neither the high number of young second-home dwellers nor the constant discussion of their role in the future development of cottage culture has managed to change that young people have received relatively little attention in Finnish second-home research. Instead, previous studies have typically focused on second-home owners (Pitkänen et al., 2014), a group that consists mostly of the middle-aged and elderly population (Adamiak et al., 2015). Children and minor youth (i.e. in Finland, persons under 18 years of age) are particularly underrepresented in this field; the most notable exception to this is the survey study on second homes and “Generation Y” Finns (aged 15–30 years at the time of the survey) by Pitkänen et al. (2014). A similar approach, with the perspective on second-home dwelling typically being that of the (aging) owner (see Müller, 2021; Pitkänen et al., 2014), also characterises second-home research in other countries. Consequently, young people as active subjects of second-home tourism have often been marginalised in the agenda of international academic discussion.

This article addresses the scholarly gap mentioned above by analysing the perceptions and experiences of cottage living among 12- to 17-year-old Finnish second-home dwellers. It focuses on the socio-cultural and spatial elements young dwellers consider essential in the construction of what they see as enjoyable second-home living. The emphasis of the analysis is on the hybrid nature of the second-home environment as a space that enables combining different aspects of traditionalist rural recreation and late modern digitalised lifestyle in pursuit of meaningful leisure. In this context, I use the term “second home” as a concept referring to summer houses, cabins and vacation homes located in rural environments and used occasionally or seasonally for purposes that are primarily recreational (see Hall & Müller, 2004; Pitkänen, Lehtimäki, et al., 2020). I also use the term “cottage” as a synonym for a second home; in the Finnish language, the word mökki (“cottage”) is commonly used to refer to rural second homes in general, regardless of their size or standard (Hiltunen et al., 2013).

The chosen approach provides second-home research with a more in-depth understanding of young people’s attitudes and views concerning second-home living. It also helps us deepen our perspective on the contemporary patterns of familial second-home tourism (see Adamiak, 2018), as the decision-making on family vacationing has become increasingly influenced by the children (e.g. Gram, 2007; Tomić et al., 2018), as
well as on the potential futures of second-home culture, as many young cottagers are likely the second-home owners and renters of tomorrow. Furthermore, the study promotes a generational shift in second-home research, extending its scope to “Generation Z” (born in the late 1990s and 2000s). The Zs are the first generation whose entire lives have been framed by digital technology (Seemiller & Grace, 2019), and unlike the typical Finnish second-home owners of today, most Generation Z cottagers have grown up surrounded by urban culture (see Pitkänen et al., 2014). This positions them as potential game-changers in relation to traditional cottage culture and its anti-technological discourses, making them a subject of particular interest for second-home research.

In addition to the scholarly context, the findings of this study may be utilised on a practical level to develop second-home tourism in a direction that better responds to the needs of contemporary youth and, thus, facilitates the integration of young people into the tradition of cottage living. This way, the understanding provided by this study can also be of help in sustaining the long-term continuity of rural second-home culture and the socio-economic uplift it offers to rural regions.

The theoretical framework of the article draws from the triad of idyllic rurality presented by David Bell (2006) and developed further by Mia Vepsäläinen and Kati Pitkänen (2010). Bell’s typology consists of three partly overlapping “scapes”, representing the natural, pastoral, and sporting aspects of rural idyll. These are the wildscape, the farmscape and the adventurescape, respectively. The wildscape consists of untamed nature in its pre-human and pre-cultural state. The farmscape refers to the artisanal agricultural landscape. Since the visual landscape associated with classical pastoral farmscape is increasingly difficult to find, this scape is often cherished through elements of traditional agrarian living and communality (Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010). Finally, the adventure-scape “constructs the rural as an adventure playground” (Bell, 2006, p. 150), with an emphasis on physical endurance and “limit experiences”. However, as this kind of adrenalin seeking is not highly characteristic of Finnish rural idyll, I follow Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen in substituting Bell’s adventurescape with the concept of activityscape, which also covers more traditional recreational activities.

In my analysis, I approach the scapes not only as types of idyllic rurality but also as spatial functions played by the second home and its surroundings. That is, the second home as a space for enjoying (relatively) pristine nature, re-enacting elements of (imagined) traditional rural lifestyle and participating in leisure activities associated with a rural setting. As such, the scapes can also be understood as dimensions of a larger spatial entity – the cottage environment as a tourist landscape. The tourist landscape concept refers to landscapes that are functionally related to tourism, often purposely constructed or moulded to meet the touristic needs of their visitors (Skowronek et al., 2018). Tourist landscapes are not limited to the realm of the visible but also comprise non-visual sensuous experiences, embodied and technological practices, social relations and cultural meanings linked to the site (Haldrup & Larsen, 2006; Minca, 2007; Pitkänen, 2008). The scapes should be seen in a corresponding way as multifaceted and interactional constructions consisting of socio-cultural, as well as material and practiced, levels (see also Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010).

To better understand the hybridity of contemporary second-home living and the cottage environment as experienced by the youth, I have supplemented the triad of rural scapes with a fourth analytic category – the technoscape. The term was originally
coined by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996), who used it to describe global flows of new technology and the way they now move “across various kinds of previously impermeable boundaries” (p. 34). I use the concept of the technoscape in a similar manner to the concepts of the other scapes, seeking to map the increasing presence of digital and mobile technology in cottage space. In this way, the concept provides the study with an analytic tool for addressing contemporary technological activities that are not typically associated with traditional cottage living or that have been consciously excluded from it. Especially, I use the concept to track the recreational and social functions of technology in the cottage environment – an area that has caught only minor attention in prior second-home research, which has focused more on the domestic and telework-related dimensions of technology.

Materials and methods

The data of this study consist primarily of semi-structured interviews conducted among 12- to 17-year-old Finns who vacation regularly at a private or rented second home in Mäntyharju. Mäntyharju is a small rural municipality with a permanent population of 5800, located 200 kilometres northeast of Helsinki in the southern part of the second-home-rich Lakeland region. The municipality is widely known for its plentiful rural nature, beautiful lakeside landscapes and numerous second-home settlements (the current number of local second homes totals almost 5000). As such, Mäntyharju represents a typical inland hotspot of traditional Finnish cottage culture, particularly in its Lakeland form (see also Pitkänen, 2008).

The interviewees were recruited primarily by posting an interview request on two local Facebook groups, Mäntyharjun vapaa-ajan asukkaat (“Second-home dwellers of Mäntyharju”, 1400 members) and Mäntyharju foorumi (“Mäntyharju forum”, 4800 members). I also used my personal networks as a former inhabitant of Mäntyharju to inform the target group about the research. Recruiting interviewees from this age group turned out to be challenging, and the general atmosphere of insecurity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic brought about additional difficulties for the process. However, I was able to recruit 14 interviewees from eight different cottage households (see Table 1). Seven of them were girls and seven were boys; their average age was 14.7 years. All interviewees

| Cottage household | Interviewees (ID: gender, age) | Interviewees’ relationship | Private/rental cottage |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1                 | I1: Male, 16                  | Cousins                    | Rental                 |
|                   | I2: Male, 16                  |                            |                        |
|                   | I3: Male, 16                  |                            |                        |
| 2                 | I4: Female, 16                | Siblings                   | Private                |
|                   | I5: Female, 14                |                            |                        |
| 3                 | I6: Female, 17                |                            | Private                |
| 4                 | I7: Female, 13                | Siblings                   | Private                |
| 5                 | I8: Female, 15                |                            | Private                |
|                   | I9: Female, 12                |                            |                        |
| 6                 | I10: Male, 15                 | Siblings                   | Rental                 |
|                   | I11: Female, 13               |                            |                        |
| 7                 | I12: Male, 16                 | Siblings                   | Private                |
|                   | I13: Male, 14                 |                            |                        |
| 8                 | I14: Male, 13                 |                            | Private                |
but one were recruited with the help of their parents. In the case of interviewees under 15 years old, written informed consent was required from a guardian before the interview.

All interviewees had their primary homes outside Mäntyharju. Nine lived in the Helsinki metropolitan area, the main residential area of Mäntyharju’s second-home population. The rest lived in urban or semi-urban municipalities by the main route leading from Helsinki to Mäntyharju. All the interviewees had spent time at a second home since their childhood, mostly at the same cottage or spot they were using at the time of the interview. The interviewees shared a mostly positive attitude towards second-home vacationing, with none of them picturing cottage living in straightforwardly negative ways. Slightly mixed tones were expressed by four persons. The interviewees’ second-home vacationing focused on the main cottage season, namely summer and early autumn. Only three of them identified themselves clearly as year-round cottagers.

The interviews took place in August and September 2020. All were conducted in Finnish (the excerpts from the interviews presented in this article have been translated into English by the author). The cottage households were interviewed one by one, while the number of interviewees per interview varied between one and three (see Table 1). The average length of an interview was 36 min, with the interviewees often being rather brief in their expression. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, except for two phone interviews. The partial use of the group interview method clearly had advantages and disadvantages here: It enhanced the recruiting process and eased the atmosphere of interviews but also caused occasional conversational dominance by older siblings over younger ones. In addition to the interviews, the interviewees were offered the opportunity to send photos and videos on their recent cottage activities via secure mobile applications. However, this only led to minor supplementary data of 13 photos and four videos from four senders.

The dialogue with the interviewees was based on a set of thematic questions prepared beforehand, but the actual structure of the discussion varied between the interviews. The questions, partly inspired by prior research, covered multiple dimensions of second-home vacationing, including typical cottage activities and routines, relations with local people, family dynamics and personal preferences concerning an ideal cottage environment. In addition, special attention was paid to recreational use of technology in the cottage environment. The possible effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on second-home vacationing were also discussed in several interviews, even though the topic was not included in the main interview themes. However, the pandemic did not seem to have caused major changes in the interviewees’ lives in this respect, except for the temporary movement restrictions and self-imposed lockdowns that blocked or reduced their second-home mobility during the spring and early summer. The interviewees also seemed rather undisturbed by, or unaware of, the heated public debate (see Pitkänen, Hannonen, et al., 2020) on the potential health risks related to second-home tourism during the pandemic.

The data were analysed using directed qualitative content analysis. This method is based on classifying and categorising data through a coding scheme built on both existing theory/research and relevant research findings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The advantage of the directed approach lies in that it enables the utilisation of prior theory and research as a starting point for analysis while simultaneously keeping them open for discussion and critique. In this case, the predetermined coding categories were drawn from prior research on the motives and socio-cultural functions of second-home vacationing.
(e.g. Hirvonen & Puustinen, 2008; Löfgren, 1999; McIntyre et al., 2006; Pitkänen et al., 2014; Williams & Kaltenborn, 1999) and they consisted of broader themes such as natural recreation, relaxing, local communality, and familial togetherness. The theoretical framework of scapes was subsequently added to the analysis as a consequence of the findings observed during the coding process. The actual coding was carried out using the Atlas.ti program. The directed approach was also applied in reporting the empirical findings, with the results section below structured in close connection with previous research.

Although the methodological framework of this study opens interesting new viewpoints on second-home tourism and young cottagers’ preferences, it also has limitations. These mainly concern the relatively small number of interviewees, which sets clear limits on the descriptive power of the data on a general level. However, it is important to note that the study at hand does not aim at producing results with direct generalizability to the population level, but rather, it seeks to offer an exploratory case perspective (see Yin, 2009) on a previously neglected segment of second-home tourism. Furthermore, the chosen method offers young second-home dwellers an opportunity to express their views on cottage vacationing in their words without filtering them through survey forms or the narration of adults. In this sense, the article takes a further step from the pioneering survey study of Pitkänen et al. (2014), aiming at a more detailed and nuanced understanding of young people’s perceptions of contemporary second-home living.

**Results**

**Enjoying nature**

Connection with nature, and the consequent access to outdoor recreation, have been widely located as core motives of rural second-home dwelling (e.g. Hall & Müller, 2004; Hirvonen & Puustinen, 2008; Löfgren, 1999; Williams & Van Patten, 2006). The importance of this back-to-nature aspect is mirrored in the locations of Finnish second homes, typically characterised by the immediate vicinity of forest and natural waters (Pitkänen, Lehtimäki, et al., 2020). Engaging with nature and outdoor activities also played a focal part in how the interviewees pictured their vision of enjoyable and meaningful cottage living. In this sense, their attitudes stand in contrast to the popular worry about younger generations’ supposed alienation from nature (see Puhakka, 2014). The crucial role of nature-related aspects in young second-home dwellers’ cottage vacationing became particularly evident in relation to lakeside nature. In fact, closeness to a body of water was the only feature mentioned in every interview as a requirement for a pleasant cottage environment. This perspective was typically associated with the idea of having a private beach suitable for swimming. The importance of swimming as a second-home activity also came up when the interviewees were asked to name their favourite things about cottage living. As it turned out, swimming stood out as the most frequent answer, brought up by nine interviewees.

The interviewees also associated lakeside nature with several other activities. For example, three 16-year-old boys, interviewed at the end of their vacation, described their usual day at the cottage as follows:

I1: We have warmed up the sauna [located by the shore] nearly every day and …
I2: … swum.
I1: And gone into the sauna.
I3: And rowed a boat.
I1: We have played a lot of cards.
I2: And checked the fish trap, and things like that. That’s the basics.

Clearly, replies like these simplify the texture of daily cottage activities in their brevity. However, this same exaggerated plainness is what makes the replies so interesting, underlining the meaning of water-related activities and lakeside nature as a particularly important and memorable part of young people’s second-home experience. Alternatively, the selectiveness of the descriptions can be interpreted as a reflection of dominant discourses, or “cultural façades” (Pitkänen, 2008), of traditional cottage culture. The images fostered by these discourses have often focused more on the “holiday utopia of endless sunny days” (Löfgren, 1999, p. 137) than on mundane cottage routines (or possible off-season vacationing during gloomier days and chillier water temperatures).

As hinted by what has been said above, the interviewees pictured the lakeside nature foremost as a versatile activityscape. Most of their cottage activities taking place in this context (e.g. swimming, bathing in a lakeshore sauna, fishing) can be categorised as traditional – or at least traditionalist (Periäinen, 2006) – rural recreational pursuits. This kind of pursuit is typically characterised by a relaxed atmosphere, slow pace and nostalgia-related undertones (Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010). The so-called new activities, connected with modernity, speed, adventure or the latest fashion (see Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010), appeared less prominent and were only brought up in single replies dealing with motorboating and paddle boarding. The wildscape aspects of lakeside nature were also occasionally referred to but less often than the activityscape dimension. The references were mostly related to the lakeside as a beautiful and serene visual landscape. This was particularly evident in the case of scenic lakeview photos sent by four interviewees. One of the photos, for example, shows a beautiful lake landscape after sunset, with the following caption: “A perfect sunset in early summer. Watched it for like an hour” (I8).

Although lakeside nature stood out as the most central spatial framework for young cottagers’ vacationing, the typical natural setting of Finnish second-home dwelling is by no means limited to this context. As pointed out in previous research, the ideal of being sheltered by forest is also deeply embedded in the idyllic trinity of Finnish cottage living: “in the country, in the shade of the trees, by the lake” (Periäinen, 2006, p. 106; see also Pitkänen, 2008). This standpoint also emerged in some of the interviews. However, the meanings the interviewees attached to the forest as a natural element differed from those related to the lakeside setting. Generally, the recreational role of forest appeared as both less central and less activity related. The interviewees’ activities in the surrounding woods (picking berries, hunting for mushrooms, having a walk, walking a dog) were also pictured as somewhat occasional. In this sense, forested nature, as experienced by young cottagers, seems to function as a visual background – albeit a crucial one when pursuing the experience of being surrounded by wild nature (Periäinen, 2006) – rather than an avidly practised activityscape.

The centrality of back-to-nature aspects appears highly interesting when studied in light of young dwellers’ active use of mobile and entertainment technologies in the cottage environment. The traditional “nature versus technology” discourse has positioned
the contemporary technoscapes as something artificial and urban, and thus, alien to nature and rural wildscape (e.g. Reuss & Cutcliffe, 2010; Thayer, 1994). Recently, for example, there has been discussion on the use of smartphones in nature, as critics consider it to decrease the restorative effects of outdoor recreation (Coyne, 2014). Traces of the oppositional discourse can also be seen in the reluctance traditional cottage culture has shown towards adopting contemporary technologies, particularly in their recreational and telework-related forms (Chaplin, 1999; Peltola & Pitkänen, 2009; Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010; Williams & Van Patten, 2006). However, the interviewees did not seem to consider the use of mobile technology or other consumer electronics at the second home disturbing. For example, when asked if they could name things that did not, in their opinion, belong in the cottage environment, only one of the interviewees—a 13-year-old male referring to video games (I14)—mentioned anything related to electronics. Instead, such activities as electronic gaming, virtual chatting, browsing social media or streaming videos, movies and music stood out as a common part of young people’s cottage living.

The interviews also implied that recreational use of technology in the cottage environment does not automatically lead to devaluation or replacement of nature-related activities. The recreational media use was often positioned, even if implicitly, as something secondary in importance to traditional cottage activities, and most of the interviewees brought the topic up only when explicitly asked. Correspondingly, recreational technology was not usually included in the descriptions of an ideal second-home environment or a typical day at the cottage. This may be partly due to the anti-technological discourses of Finnish cottage culture, which have maintained much of their influence despite the actual increase in the technological standards of second homes (Peltola & Pitkänen, 2009). Nevertheless, these features can also be interpreted as an indication of what seems like a complementary role of technology in the second-home environment. From this perspective, the consumption of entertainment technology and consumer electronics appears mostly as a supplementary practice taking place between, or after, nature-centric activities. Technology can also substitute for outdoor activities in cases where weather (or other) conditions do not permit spending time outside. This was aptly illustrated by the words of a 16-year-old male interviewee:

JP: Do you ever feel bored [at the cottage]?
I12: Nowadays, when you can take, like, computers and PlayStation with you, they compensate for the possible lack of a pastime . . .

JP: [Do you use the smartphone] less or more than at home?
I12: It depends. If it’s, for example, a rainy day, and you can’t go out and do something there, I use it more. Less, if there’s something nice to do.

In this way, the dimensions of wildscape and natural activityscape may become interlaced with digitalised technoscapes, forming a highly hybridised space of recreation.

**Slowing down**

Adult second-home dwellers often perceive the cottage environment as a space that enables a temporary escape from everyday routines, duties and pressures (e.g. Chaplin, 1999; McIntyre et al., 2006; Pitkänen, 2008). This view is typically combined with an emphasis on rest and relaxation as pivotal motives for second-home living (e.g. Hall &
However, while the adult cottagers’ craving for a break from the hustle and bustle of everyday life is well documented, the restorative potential of second-home living among young cottagers has been left mostly unstudied (however, see Pitkänen, Lehtimäki, et al., 2020). Hence, it is noteworthy that the idea of the second home as a place for slowing down the pace of life was also brought up in the interviews, even if it was not as heavily underlined as it tends to be in the discourses of older second-home dwellers. Several interviewees mentioned “just hanging”, “chilling”, “taking it easy” or “doing nothing” as their typical cottage activity. Three interviewees also referred to a relaxed atmosphere and the lack of obligations as their favourite aspects in second-home vacationing. When asked to name the best things about cottage living, two of them gave the following replies:

13: That you don’t have to do anything. You can just “be”.
12: Serene landscape. And that you can get away from all the noise. And that you can have time off: You don’t have to do anything or take care of anything.

It is important to understand that “doing nothing” does not necessarily refer to total inactivity but rather to avoiding activities that cause stress in everyday life and to the state of being in charge of one’s use of time. This experience of control can be located as one of the key elements behind the restorative effects of second-home living. As Davina Chaplin (1999, p. 46) stated, “having control over routine or ritual, rather than feeling overwhelmed or imprisoned by it, seems to be a significant part of this process of getting away from it all”. The interviews showed that young people may also long for this kind of respite. This is understandable, considering that many of them have their everyday lives tightly framed with school, hobbies and peer activities, as well as multiple stressors related to them (e.g. Byrne et al., 2007; Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2020).

In addition to offering a break from everyday bustle, cottage vacationing is often pictured as a way of distancing oneself from (urbanised) modernity in general (McIntyre et al., 2006; Williams & Kaltenborn, 1999; Williams & Van Patten, 2006). Norman McIntyre (2006, p. 13) described second-home vacationing as an “escape from the pressing realities of modern life into a play space where one can create or recreate a more authentic self”. This escapist playfulness is typically practiced through the adoption of elements, activities and roles from (what is imagined to be) the traditional rural lifestyle (Chaplin, 1999; McIntyre et al., 2006; Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010). This is also where the farmscape dimension of idyllic rurality intersects with second-home living in the most evident form. Traditional cottage culture leans largely on the imagery of the countryside as a cultural sphere characterised by a simple and slow lifestyle, and it is these same features through which the symbolic breakaway from modernity has often been pursued (see Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010). This “cult of simplicity” (Löfgren, 1999, p. 138), materialised in modest and rustic living conditions, has loosened its grip among Finnish second-home dwellers (Peltola & Pitkänen, 2009), but traces of it are still visible in the discourses of young cottagers:

18: I wouldn’t like to stay in a modern cottage but [prefer staying] in a wooden cottage. I think it looks more like a [proper] cottage than a house-like cottage does.
15: Although the outhouse isn’t the most comfortable option, it would feel weird to have a toilet in the cottage.
In fact, survey results by Hirvonen and Puustinen (2008) suggest that, contrary to popular belief (see Pitkänen et al., 2014), young second-home dwellers may even be less interested in providing their second homes with modern amenities than their older fellow cottagers are. However, the age-related differences seem to be at least partly linked to the fact that the overall time spent at the second home is shorter among the young (Pitkänen et al., 2014). In addition, the survey results indicate clear individual variation in attitudes within the young generation. The variation was also evident in the interview data. Some interviewees, for example, emphasised the importance of electricity (an amenity every cottage household in the data had), whereas others said that they could see themselves coping without it. Similarly, whereas several interviewees considered a toilet or shower unnecessary, others missed these amenities.

The presence of the late modern technoscape in the cottage environment shows that the “voluntary simplicity” (Chaplin, 1999) fostered by second-home dwellers can also be very selective. For instance, the female interviewee who disliked modern cottage architecture did not see streaming TV shows on her phone or using a laptop as inappropriate practices in the second-home context. Similarly, the female cottager who considered the idea of having a toilet in the cottage strange fluently included occasional gaming on a tablet computer in her second-home activities. These cultural compromises, whether conscious or not, strongly support the idea of the second home as a playful hybrid space – a leisure environment that enables combining different lifestyles and historical times quite freely, according to one’s personal preferences.

The compromising selectivity concerning the ideals of simple life and the use of new technology in cottage space can also be viewed as an indication of a cultural negotiation between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the familiar and the Other (see also Williams & Kaltenborn, 1999). Michael Haldrup (2004) suggested that although second-home vacationing is typically motivated by the idea of escaping the setting and routines of primary home and everyday life, this escapism is often counterbalanced by symbolic domestication of the vacation site. That is, the second-home environment is provided with a certain feeling of familiarity and homeliness through various “homemaking” practices, such as decorating the cottage space or exploring its surroundings. These practices eventually result in the construction of “hybrid landscapes of home and away,” where “an idealized version of extraordinary everyday lives … can be played out” (pp. 437, 444). Following Haldrup’s thinking, I argue that young cottagers’ use of technology in the second-home environment can be interpreted as a part of this same domestication process – a search for a satisfying balance between cosy ordinariness and refreshing exoticism (see also Lipkina, 2013) – in its present-day form.

**Cherishing communality**

Finnish cottage culture leans on the idea of the restoring solitude provided by geographic isolation and a limited number of social contacts (Hiltunen & Rehunen, 2014; Periäinen, 2006; Pitkänen, 2008). This idea is materialised in the dispersed spatial distribution of second homes, as cottages are typically scattered in forested areas outside rural villages and community centres (Hiltunen & Rehunen, 2014). Correspondingly, neighbouring cottages are usually built as far away from each other as possible (Hiltunen & Rehunen, 2014; Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010). This indicates an emphasis on the wildscape ideal of
“being alone in the middle of nature” (Periäinen, 2006, p. 111) over the aspects of local communality associated with the farmscape idyll (see Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010).

Signs of this isolationist mentality could be seen in the way several interviewees highlighted the role of serenity or silence as part of an ideal cottage experience. The elements of seclusion were also present in the way in which the interviewees described their lack of connection with the local community. They did not participate in communal events actively, and their visits elsewhere in Mäntyharju focused mostly on necessity shopping or having coffee at the municipal centre. The interviewees’ contacts with locals and cottage neighbours also seemed occasional and superficial. In some cases, this was at least partly due to the lack of favourable occasions for becoming acquainted with these other people. In other cases, the seclusion was more of a deliberate choice, as in the following:

I4: I know the surname of those living next to us, but I don’t … They have some …

I5: They have some children, but I don’t know if they are our age at all …

JP: Would you like to have stronger communal bonds with cottage neighbours or locals?

I4: Not really.
I5: Not really. It’s nice to be there with the family. … The nice thing about the cottage is that you can be there on your own.

Overall, the scarcity of local contacts seems to culminate among young cottagers. The survey conducted by Hirvonen and Puustinen (2008) indicated that Finnish second-home dwellers’ interest in participating in local events and social networks increased towards the older age groups. The findings of this study support the results of Hirvonen and Puustinen in the sense that the young interviewees’ regular contact with locals and cottage neighbours seemed to consist mostly of acquaintances of their older family members. The age-related differences are in part explained by the positive correlation between age and days spent at the cottage, with intensive use of a second home increasing the motivation for local interaction (Hirvonen & Puustinen, 2008). Older cottagers also more often have a rural background, which is likely to encourage them to take part in local networks (Hirvonen & Puustinen, 2008; see also Hall & Müller, 2004).

Despite young cottagers’ lack of connectedness with the local community, the interviewees still saw social relations as an important part of second-home living, and their ideas of pleasurable cottage vacationing included multiple dimensions of communality. However, this communality was mostly family-centric, typically excluding people who were unrelated to the interviewees (friends were a notable exception, and their overnight visits were an anticipated part of second-home vacationing). This finding is in line with previous results on the second home as a place and space for cherishing intense traditional family togetherness (see Löfgren, 1999; Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010; Williams & Van Patten, 2006). The idea of cottage living as a return to the (utopian) times “when families were families” (Löfgren, 1999, p. 269) was also supported by interviewees’ references to extended family members, most notably grandparents and cousins, as important co-dwellers and co-vacationers. This kind of traditionalist familialism has been seen as a counterbalance to the segmented and complex family dynamics of modern living (Williams & Van Patten, 2006). Strong familial communality is also one of the elements linking cottage culture with the aspects of the farmscape idyll and the traditional lifestyle associated with it (Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010).
The extent to which intensive family togetherness was valued by the interviewees is worth noting. All interviewees considered family communality an important or somewhat important element of a positive cottage experience. Four listed spending time with family as among their favourite things about cottage living. In contrast, the interviews indicated clear variation in the amount and social frameworks of cottage-related “family time”. Some interviewees said that they spent most of their time at the second home doing things alone or with their siblings or cousins. For others, the cottage environment offered a space for intensive extra-generational communality with plenty of time spent with parents or grandparents. The spectrum of familial activities the interviewees described also varied, spanning from traditional cottage activities, such as playing lawn games or picking berries, to more recent pursuits, such as movie nights.

The interview data also show how the contemporary technoscape supplements the cottage environment with influential new dimensions of social interaction. These dimensions depart essentially from the ideals of wildscape solitude and traditionalist, farmscape-influenced family culture. For example, the interviews indicate that young second-home dwellers sometimes use mobile technology to create private virtual “pockets” in the otherwise intense social texture of cottage living. A 13-year-old male interviewee (I14) brought this out explicitly: “I just put on my earplugs and I have endless amounts of privacy and own space”, he stated in reply to a question about the possible lack of personal space at the second home. This also suggests that mobile technology can function as an effective safety valve, preventing social tensions – or as Löfgren (1999, p. 152) puts it, “an overdose of togetherness” – caused by the intensified familial communality of cottage space.

In addition, the interviewees transgressed the immediate social space of the cottage environment by using their smartphones to maintain contact with their friends elsewhere:

JP: What do you usually use [the smartphone] for [at the cottage]?
I10: Listening to music or watching videos.
I11: Chatting with friends.
JP: How do you chat? By using an app?
I10 & I11: Yeah.
JP: What app do you usually use?
I11: Facetime or Snapchat, for instance.
I10: Or WhatsApp.

At their best, young cottagers’ ways of utilising digital networking can be rather creative. For example, one interviewee (I3) described how, while at the cottage, she organised a collective movie night with her distant friends using a shared video connection.

Regular virtual interaction with faraway friends provides second-home living with a parallel level of communality that both augments and contrasts with the social dimensions of traditional cottage culture. It is clear that maintaining active peer contact via mobile applications contradicts the idea of isolating cottage spaces from the spheres of everyday life and the world outside. Browsing of social media platforms has a similar effect. In this sense, young cottagers seem to follow the ideal of social seclusion quite selectively. At the same time, the coexistence of these seemingly contradictory levels of communality can be understood as yet another indicator of the hybrid nature of second-home living. From this perspective, the cottage environment appears as a space of mediated remoteness, in which the elements of isolation and (virtual)
connectedness become intertwined, overlapping and complementing each other. That is, a space in which one can distance oneself from the distracting aspects of everyday life while simultaneously maintaining a connection with a selected network of friends “back home”. This, again, supports Haldrup’s (2004) theory of the second-home environment as a hybrid landscape of “home and away”, as well as my previous argument about the balancing role of technology between these two spheres. It is likely that the possibility for this kind of social balancing is particularly significant for young second-home dwellers, who clearly value the serenity of the cottage environment, but at the same time, are in a stage of life in which the role of intensive peer communality is highly important.

Conclusion
The purpose of this article was to study young second-home dwellers’ perceptions and experiences of second-home vacationing through the lens of semi-structured interview data. Previously, this field of second-home living has been mostly ignored in both Finnish and international research, despite the influential role young people play in second-home tourism. The subject was approached by locating the socio-cultural and spatial elements that form the basis for what the young second-home dwellers considered a pleasurable cottage environment and enjoyable second-home living. These elements were studied by using the conception of cottage environment as a combination of various “scapes” – that is, the wildscape, the farmscape, the activityscape and the technoscape – as a theoretical starting point. The concepts of the wildscape, farmscape and activityscape, derived from the fields of rural studies and second-home research, were used in the analysis to categorise the functions and cultural meanings of the cottage environment as a rural leisure space. The concept of the technoscape, adopted from the writings of Appadurai (1996), represents a more novel approach to second-home dwelling, focusing on the increasing ubiquity of technology in late modern life and leisure.

The article shows that studying young people’s cottage vacationing may provide second-home research with new fruitful views on the meanings, practices, and potentials of contemporary second-home tourism. This was particularly evident in relation to the technoscape dimension of second-home living, onto which the interviews with young cottagers opened a rare, if not unique, perspective. At the same time, the findings of the article call for more in-depth research on the subject. In the future, young people as agents of second-home tourism should be studied based on more extensive data. It is similarly important to broaden the scope of analysis to include those young people who do not consider cottage vacationing a pleasant form of recreation or who do not have regular access to a second home, as well as those young cottagers who also have their primary homes in the countryside. The absence of these groups and the perspectival limitations caused by it should also be considered when evaluating the findings of this study.

The interview data produced an image of young people’s second-home vacationing as a hybridised lifestyle mixing elements of (imagined) traditional rurality and late modern leisure, and thus, constructing a diverse venue for recreation, relaxation and communality. The hybridity of this lifestyle became particularly evident in the way in which the young second-home dwellers combined the recreational and social use of new technology with
elements of traditional(ist) cottage culture. This resulted in a multi-layered leisure environment in which the nostalgic ideals of simple, nature-centric living went side by side with late modern media consumption and in which voluntary isolation and closed family dynamics became entwined with active virtual interaction with peers “outside”.

The data also implied a certain hierarchy within the hybridity that emerged. First, the interviewees emphasised the role of nature-related activities, serene rural landscapes and familial togetherness as the primary elements of enjoyable second-home vacations. Second, the recreational use of technology often appeared in the interviewees’ narration as something secondary – supplementary content filling the gaps and dull moments between more traditional cottage activities. Thus, the data suggest that although the realms of technology and nature, or technology and traditional cottage living, have often been pictured as oppositional, the increasing presence of the late modern technoscope in the second-home environment does not automatically mean replacing or devaluing the natural ideals or core elements of traditional cottage culture. In fact, the relationship between these spheres often appeared as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Overall, the findings of this study emphasise the need to consider the recreational and social dimensions of technology more thoroughly when discussing the measures for developing the field of second-home tourism. The results above suggest that constructing second-home spaces that enable both traditional cottage living and diverse use of new technology may considerably enhance the integration of today’s youth into the world of rural second-home dwelling. Furthermore, linking this insight with the previous notion about mutually non-exclusive and complementary relations between the scapes, the article suggests that developing the technological setting of second-home living may also be an effective way of sustaining the vitality of traditional cottage culture. However, to better comprehend this potential and to utilise it to the fullest, we need to further improve our understanding of both young people’s second-home activities and the role of technology in contemporary cottage living.

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