

SOCIO-SPATIAL DIFFERENTIATIONS AND SECOND HOME SETTLEMENT DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF THE EVOIKOS COASTAL AREA IN GREECE

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Short Outline

The central theme of the paper is the social and spatial changes brought about by the second home settlement development using as a case study of the Evoikos coastal area in Greece. It is a subject with limited international experience, it supports the need for a change of focus on the issue of time planning, and the applied methodology is useful for comparative research in Europe.

Introduction

The topic of the paper focuses on the socio-spatial changes brought about by the second home settlement development in the Greek coastal areas. Second home development in Greece emerged as a mass phenomenon during the last two-three decades. Late and rapid urbanization in Greece lead to the existence of large numbers of first-or second-generation city residents who often inherit or own old family country houses in the countryside (Shaw and Williams, 1994: 235). Also, according to 1998 data, second homes account for around 40 per cent of all types of private accommodation of holiday trips in Greece, with only Portugal showing a larger figure of 79.7 per cent (European Commission, 2001: 240-1).

This development took place within the framework of a much less developed market for tourist products and services. The latter is directly connected with some attributes of a potential demand that could be characterised as “idiosyncratic”, in comparison to similar conditions in the developed industrialised countries. The low percentage of wage earners and the limited growth of the welfare state constituted inhibiting factors for the development of classic forms of mass production and circulation of products and services, which, in turn, limited effective demand. The latter phenomenon fostered the creation of alternative structures and consumption practices, which managed to combine the desired outcome with some kind of

individual/family security. The aim was to deal with needs that, due to the proliferation of the means of communication and the internationalisation of the capitalist prototypes, tend to become unified, irrespective of their geographical location.

The main hypothesis to be tested refers to the existence of considerable local differentiation. Are the modes of articulation of the social and the spatial characterized by variety and complexity, and should this factor function as a central consideration of research and planning for 'big bangs'? The organising construct of the paper is the demonstration of the spatial and social differentiations related to the settlement structure of a wider area, through the identification of a socio-spatial typology based upon the changing social and professional composition of its resident population as related to long term settlement development.

The source material of the paper is based on an extensive research project conducted in the Evoikos coastal area in Greece by an interdisciplinary team from the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA) and the National Centre for Social Research in Athens (NCSR).

The Case Study: The Evoikos Coastal Area in Greece

The broader region of the Evoikos Coastal Area is used in order to demonstrate the spatial and social differentiations related to settlement structure utilising multivariate methods of data analysis (for a detailed presentation of the classification methodology see NTUA/NCSR, 1997).

The starting point of the analysis is the identification of sub-regions, based upon the socio-professional composition of their population. A similar classification based on the proportion of empty dwellings per municipality was also made. These distinct "spatial groups" have been combined and new categories of regions emerge which map considerable socio-spatial differentiation in the study area.

The combined examination of the socio-professional structure of the resident population of the study area, in connection with the intensity of primary residence use, gave rise to a variety of "socio-spatial groups". The detailed analysis of this area typology with regard to the socio-spatial characteristics of the various groups leads to four main observations:

a) in the Evoikos Coastal Area, areas can be identified where there is a significant overrepresentation of high and middle socio-professional categories among the active

population, which coexist with a high percentage of empty dwellings. However, in these regions “niches” of intensive agricultural activity are observed, as well as a high proportion of working class strata in their active population. The variety of professional categories, which comprise the physiognomy of these regions, is related to the phenomenon of the development of second homes, the restructuring of the primary sector, and the spatial expansion of the Athens Conurbation and of other smaller urban centres of the region, e.g. Chalkis, Lamia, Thiva;

b) there exists a considerable number of areas where there is no significant second home development, nevertheless within their boundaries there is some concentration of second home development in “niches” whose geophysical profile is particularly suitable for vacation. In particular, these are areas where there is intensive agricultural activity combined with an on going process of second home settlement development. In these areas the pulsar effect of second home development is highly visible;

c) in the areas of intense tourist activity within the boundaries of the study area, there is no significant reduction in primary sector activities;

d) the functional expansion of the Athens Conurbation gives also rise to “niches” of working class areas within the boundaries of the study area, mainly along the national road linking Athens and Thessaloniki. In addition, there is some concentration of working class population around smaller and traditional industrial zones, as well as around new industrial areas. It is worth noting that in these geographical “niches” there is no significant displacement of agricultural activities.

Conclusions

The analysis of the different types of areas has demonstrated the varying modes of articulation of social and spatial factors. The “socio-spatial” taxonomy aims to contribute to the investigation of the phenomenon of second home development and settlement development in conjunction with the emerging socio-spatial differentiations and through the use of a production of space/production of nature approach.

The analysis of the “socio-spatial groups” demonstrates the complex interdependencies, in space and time, between the development of second homes, settlement development and social processes that occur in the broader geographical regions. Similar correlations constitute a field of comparative research between geographical areas in Europe, particularly in the Mediterranean basin, which are

clearly developmental poles of attraction for second homes and settlement development (Gortsos, Kamoutsi, Sayas, Panayotatos, 2000). The analysis of the international experience indicates some additional issues for further research: a) the creation of retirement communities (Stroud, 1995); b) the relationship between migration and tourism (Williams and Hall, 2000); c) the transformation of rural scenery into urban scenery due to the development of second homes (Lozato-Gotart, 1985/1996); d) the transformation of second homes into permanent residences (Nyström, 1989).

The approach proposed in this paper can function as a model methodology for monitoring and evaluating the social consequences that will emerge from intense “pulsar” activity location in areas not specifically organised for that purpose. The extent and form of second home development have various implications for planning. A crucial element is the new tendency of time planning that refers mainly to the following factors: a) the importance of rhythms (e.g. in connection to retirement as a particular phase of life as well as to everyday life), b) the extension of tourism during the year rather than its concentration in peaks (especially domestic tourism in August), and c) the coping with the fact that space is given and can be bought, while time is flexible and can be exchanged (e.g. time sharing).

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