Rural Second Homes and the Well-Being of Young Adults

Bachelor's Project

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Summary

Rural second homes have gained importance in recent decades, as they provide a getaway from an increasingly urbanizing world and an opportunity to reconnect with nature. The trend on the use of second homes is predicted to grow in the future due to increasing mobility rates and smart working practices, further accentuated in a post-pandemic situation.

Previous research has identified the main elements of the experience to own a second home in a rural context and their connection to the individual well-being; however, this has yet to be investigated among young adults specifically. This research project aims to get an insight into the effects on the personal well-being of young adults of having access to a rural second home. The qualitative research, carried out in the Italian context, analyzes the experiences of ten Italian young adults with access to a rural second home.

The results show that for young adults the second home and its rural context mostly serve as the base for outdoor recreational and sport activities, which are highly beneficial to the well-being. The natural environment, combined with a rural lifestyle, for young adults represents an attraction in itself, more than an escape from the urban daily life.

The second home is perceived by young people as meaningful for family life; however, what influences place attachment and well-being most is the social network developed early in life that creates a unique experience which cannot be replicated in other settings.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In recent decades, a large body of research has established a positive connection between interactions with nature and health and personal wellbeing (Bratman et al., 2019; Keniger et al., 2013; Hartig et al., 2014; Kaplan, 2001). This assumes high relevance considering that the world is increasingly urbanizing; within 30 years, over 70% of the world population will be living in urbanized areas (WHO, 2016).

It is proven that among the consequences of contemporary urbanized lifestyles are reduced contacts and interactions with nature and natural elements (Cox et al., 2017). In particular, direct access to nature and experiences of wilderness become increasingly unavailable to the new generations, which are instead characterized by sedentary activities and time spent indoors (Bratman et al., 2019). Most people may benefit from reconnecting with nature more regularly. For a number of households, this purpose is met by the use of rural second homes.

According to recent estimates, 15.6% of the European population owns a secondary residence; 60% of the owners use it for holiday, leisure, and recreational purposes (REMAX, 2015). The rate of second home ownership increased significantly in the last decades across Europe (Dijst et al., 2005). Among other reasons for this increase, there are new consumption patterns adopted by a growing urban population distancing from rural life, and an improvement in transport infrastructure that reduces travelling times and distances (Oliveira, 2013). Second home tourism is a common research topic in the field of social sciences. Extensive research has been made on the impact of second homes on places, communities, and tourism, as well as on the historical and spatial development of this phenomenon (Hall and Müller, 2018; Gallent and Tewdwr-Jones, 2000).

Literature on the topic of second homes focuses on certain regions where the phenomenon is common, like Scandinavia (Gallent, 2014), and on particular age groups. Because the probability of owning a second home increases with age and it is often linked to specific life stages such as retirement (Dijst et al., 2005; Norris and Winston, 2010; Jansson and Muller, 2004), the research on the benefits of owning second homes is typically focused on the elderly. Less investigation has been conducted on the impact of a second home on the life of young adults, between 15 and 29 years of age.

The trend on the use of second homes is predicted to be growing in the future due to higher mobility rates, development of smart working practices, higher disposable incomes, and increasing rates of urbanization (Coppock, 1977; Jansson and Muller, 2004; Akerlund et al., 2015). Furthermore, the pandemic situation has accelerated the interest for the purchase and the use of second homes for holiday purposes in the immediate future (Gallent, 2020; Balestrieri, 2020). It is conceivable that, among the many outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic, lifestyle changes and phenomena such as smart working and on-line learning are contributing to give a new significance and a new meaning to the concept of "home". Therefore, investigating the associations between home and personal well-being of young adults becomes relevant now more than ever. It is of uttermost importance to explore the topic of rural second homes in relation to the well-being of young adults also because it can provide understanding about the future

patterns of second home ownership and use, and it can give thoughtful insights for future policymaking in the field.

1.2. Research Problem

The aim of the research is to get an insight into the effects on the personal well-being of young adults of having a rural second home available to them.
The elements that form the experience of a rural second home for a young adult are identified and then analyzed through an interdisciplinary review of the current literature on the topic.

The main question of this research is:

"*How does the availability of a rural second home influence personal well-being of young adults?*"

In order to answer the main question, the following sub questions will be investigated:

- *To what extent does the natural setting of the second home contribute to the well-being of young adults?*
- *Which factors contribute to a feeling of place attachment to a rural second home by young adults?*

1.3. Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 features an introduction to the research, presenting the background on the topic and underlining the literature context in which the literature sets itself.
The theoretical framework in Chapter 2 offers an overview of the research to date on the topic of second homes, in addition to key concepts on the subject. A graphical representation of the theoretical framework is presented in the conceptual model (Fig. 1).
Chapter 3 portrays the methodology section, which offers a description of the methods used to conduct the research and an explanation on why these methods were chosen, as well as ethical considerations.
The results section in Chapter 4 shows the findings obtained through the qualitative research and critically analyzes them in light of the insights gained through the literature review.
Chapter 5 contains the conclusion that summarizes the results of the research.

2. Theoretical Framework

In spite of a large body of research devoted to the topic of second homes and second home tourism, there is no comprehensive definition on what exactly constitutes a second home. Different countries, as well as different research fields, propose and use different definitions and interpretations for this concept (Bailey, 2019). The fuzziness and intangibility of the concept of second homes are recognized by Haldrup (2009), who claims the need of a variable contextual definition.
The literature on the topic either operationalizes general and broad definitions (Roca, 2013) or follows the national census terminology (Oliveira, 2013).
Alternative terms used in the literature on the topic are "recreational home", "leisure home", "summer house" (Muller, 2011). Kaltenborn (1998) highlights the importance of the word "home", as it implies a feeling of attachment by the dweller.
Because of the struggle in identifying a common definition of 'second home', Back and Marjavaara (2017) suggest that the term may be used as an "umbrella concept" that also takes into account factors related to the place and the context.

Another difficulty lies in the area of data collection. Practical complications in the census of second homes create an obstacle in producing data and statistics that are reliable and comparable among countries. This is often due to misdeclarations for tax purposes or to complex family situations (Gallent, 2014; Dijst, 2005; Corriere della Sera, 2008).
Based on the statistical data that are available, a wide variation in the rates of ownership of second houses can be observed in different countries. Even within the European Union it ranges from lower than 5% in countries like the Netherlands or Germany to up to 50% in the Scandinavian countries (Brunetti & Torricelli, 2017). In Italy the share of people who own at least one secondary home is around 15%; the vast majority of these secondary dwellings are reported to be located in rural areas and to be used for holiday and leisure purposes (REMAX, 2015).
In the statistics generated within the European Union, rural areas are defined as all areas outside urban centers (Eurostat, 2020). For the purpose of this research, in consideration of the fact that the boundary between urban and rural is more and more blurred (Dymitrow et al., 2016), a degree of subjectivity is included in the use of the term "rural", based on the perspective of the respondent and on the context.

2.1. Rural Setting

The desire of a reconnection with the natural world is a predominant factor in the use of a rural second home (Jaakson, 1986; McIntyre & Svanqvist, 2004).
McIntyre et al. (2006) maintain that the contact with nature in this context evokes a sort of "reflexive playfulness".
Kaltenborn (1998) also identifies "back to nature" as one the main themes in the experience of a second home, involving extensive contact with the natural surroundings and a simple lifestyle, as well as physical and psychological rest. Nature provides restorative and therapeutic experiences with direct beneficial impact on stress level and quality of life in general (Akerlund et al., 2015).

The term in the literature that is most commonly associated with the experience of a rural second home is "escape", which is often identified as one of the drivers in the decision to pursue a second home. It is reported that the vast majority of users of rural second homes have their primary dwelling in an urban setting (Akerlund et al., 2015). The literature identifies several escape motives within the rural/urban dichotomy; one is escape from the daily routine (Jaakson, 1986). Other motivations are escape from modernity (Williams, 2006) and from the pressure of city life (Dijst, 2005; McIntyre et al., 2006) by way of seeking refuge in nature, in the "rustic minimalism", and in the remoteness of the second home, usually with a lower presence of technology.

Through a research on British second homeowners in rural France, Chaplin (1999) also identifies the common motives of escape as stress, pressure, and routine of daily life, powerful drivers to escape to uncommodified ludic spaces and to a retreat. Respondents report second homes as spaces where they lose track of time and where they have control over their routine, rather than having it driven by the working urban life (Chaplin, 1999).

In a study conducted in Sweden, Hartig & Fransson (2009) found a strong correlation between ownership of a leisure home in the countryside and good health in old age; however, their study is not inclusive of some other critical contingent aspects that could have altered the results.

The kind of activities that users perform at the rural second home also contributes to the feeling of escape. Maintenance of the house and its premises is very often mentioned as one of those activities (McIntyre and Svanqvist, 2004), also referred to as "pleasure motivated work" (Kaltenborn, 1998). Tasks like gardening and renovating may assume a pleasant connotation due to the fact that they often cannot be performed in the context of the primary dwelling and don't come with schedules or deadlines to meet. The "effort it takes to survive" in the rural second home is often appreciated as a tradeoff for the closeness to nature and the remoteness from urban life (Chaplin, 1999; McIntyre & Svanqvist, 2004).

The second home can also be used as a base for outdoor recreational activities featuring the natural setting, such as hiking, skiing, or water-based sports (Akerlund et al., 2015).

2.2. Second Home

The notion of home involves a feeling of attachment to the place, as the home provides rootedness, a center of meaning, and a sense of belonging (Kaltenborn, 1998; Cresswell, 2014). Place attachment is reported to have a direct positive effect on social, physical, and psychological well-being of individuals (Afshar et al., 2016; Junot et al., 2018; Rollero & Piccoli, 2010), and ultimately on nature connectedness (Basu et al., 2020).

Second homes in particular may bring feelings of place attachment when they provide the users with a sense of continuity through life. Unlike the first dwelling that may change through the various stages of life, the second home usually represents a stable presence in the lifespan of its users. Main contributors to place attachment for second homes are family ties and childhood experiences, family memories and stories, investments in the property, and the fulfilment of the desire to have such property (McIntyre & Svanqvist, 2004).

The second home also represents an important element for the family life (Ellingsen & Hidle, 2013). It provides a sense of continuity across and within generations, as well as a place and

space for family togetherness; *"Daily paths and projects of individual family members are spatially bounded and more interwoven at the cottage, a site of family memories, providing symbolic territorial identification across generations."* (Williams & Kaltenborn, 1998, p.223). The second house is often purchased with the intent to pass it on to the next generation, while this is usually not the case for the primary dwelling (Jaakson, 1986). In certain countries, such as Italy, what is now the second home was once the primary home of past generations of the family, who then migrated to urban areas and kept the house for tourism purposes (Perri, 2013).

Lundmark & Marjavaara (2013) make a case that most of the research on the topic of the experience of second homes puts an emphasis on the positive effects, while neglecting the negative outcomes of such experience. Differently, their study focuses on "involuntary" second homeowners, namely those people who have inherited a second property but, for various reasons, feel reluctant about it. The absence of any decision-making power is claimed to negatively influence the enjoyment of the second home, as satisfaction is directly related to the freedom in the choice of the house. A study by Brunetti & Torricelli (2017) in the Italian context concluded that second homes inherited from previous generations are eighteen percent points more likely to be left unused.

On the other hand, the fact that the second home is a family heritage might create a further bond to the place, contributing to the attribution of a meaning to the word "home". Jaakson (1986, p.381) brings the case of two brothers whose father passed away: *"They promptly sold the urban house where they had lived since childhood. But when asked if they would also sell the cottage, they looked aghast and replied: "We'd never sell the cottage!" ... The cottage was their emotional home, the city house a mere residence.'.* Nouza et al. (2018) report that individuals with a prior personal and family connection to the second home and to its place exhibit a higher level of place attachment in that respect. The study presents the second home as a link between past and present in the individual and family history.

The theme of social life and social contacts in the context of the second home presents different points of view and brings different results depending on location and characteristics of the second home. While some users specifically seek the quietness and like to spend time alone or with the close family as in the case of cabin owners in Norway in the study by Williams & Kaltenborn (1998), or simply do not value social contacts in this context (Pitkänen, 2008), other users report they have more friends and a larger social circle in their second home location compared to their primary dwelling (Williams & Van Patten, 2006).

2.3. Conceptual Model

Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of the theoretical framework.
The themes of nature, escape, and performed activities converge into the aspect of the rural setting in which the second home is located.
The notion of second home entails the aspect of place attachment. This is built up by the themes of family, condition of "inheritance" of the house, and social contacts.
The aspects of rural setting and of the notion of second home are linked and relevant to each other; they have effects on the well-being of young adults who use the house.
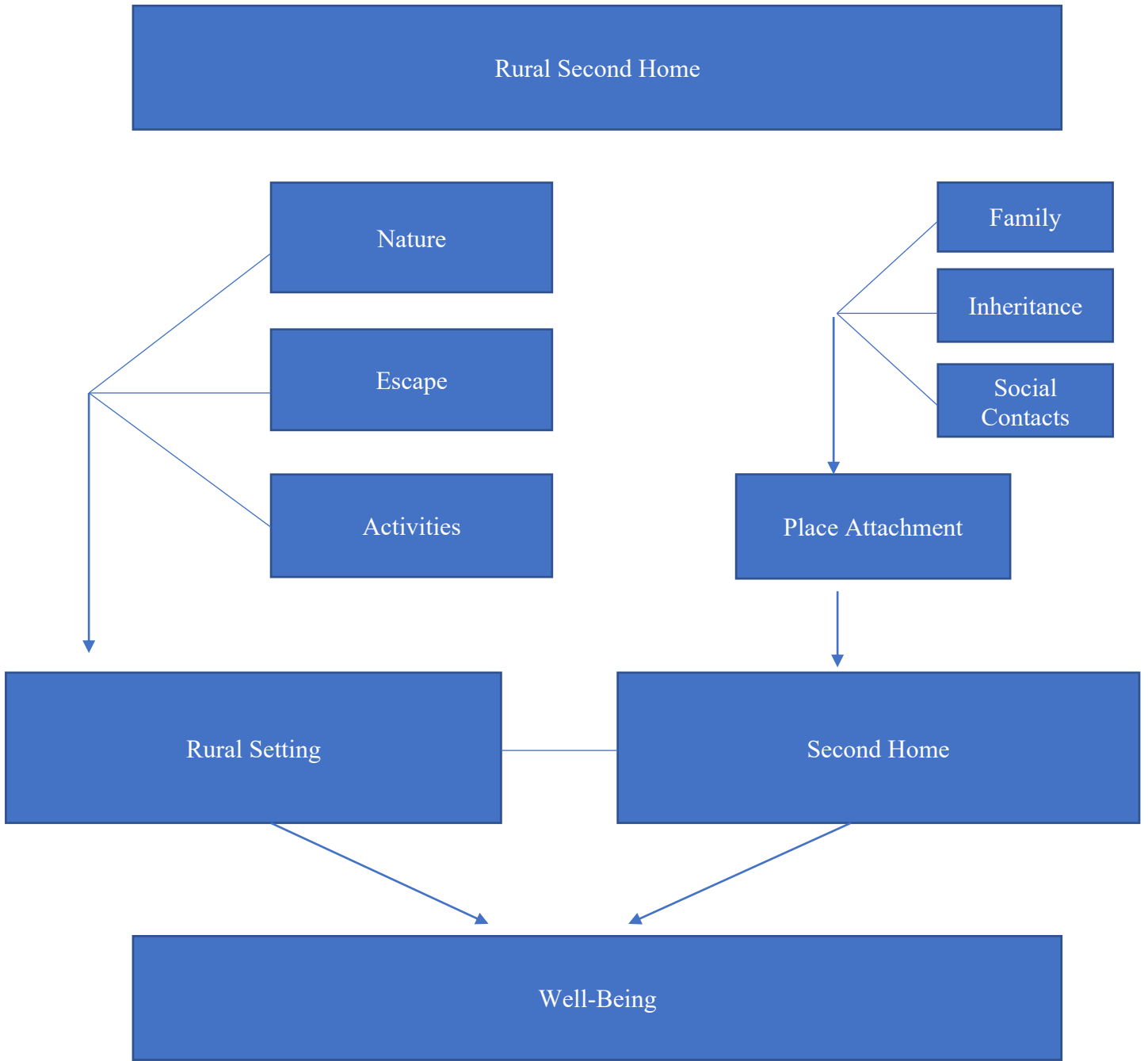
Fig. 1 – Conceptual Model

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Method

The research is based on primary, qualitative data. The data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, considering the experiences of young adults who regularly access a second home in a natural setting. A qualitative research method was the most suitable in the context of this project; it allowed participants to freely and extensively share their feelings and experiences on the topic, while at the same time giving the researcher an opportunity to record forms of non-verbal or involuntary response. Also, the choice of performing qualitative research in the form of interviews was related to the specificity of the population to be investigated, which a quantitative research strategy wouldn't have allowed to target as effectively. Furthermore, the nature of the topic sparkled reactions and strong feelings in the respondents, often involving memories and family. Since every experience and every narrative is personal and unique, personal interviews were deemed more appropriate than other qualitative methods such as focus groups (Longhurst, 2016; Punch, 2014).

3.2. Sample

The study aims to explore the experiences of young adults, considered between 15 and 29 years of age, in relation to a rural second home. Therefore, interviewees were required to have regular access to a second home featuring a natural setting. Houses owned for profit or investment, but not used for leisure purposes, were therefore not taken into account.
Interviewees were recruited via snowball sampling. This strategy involves asking to the interviewees themselves to help you in recruiting other contacts (Longhurst, 2016).
The sample included ten participants, aged between 19 and 23.

While the general patterns in the experiences with second home are overall similar, between different countries there might be still cultural and social elements acting as a bias in the phenomenon of second homes, making comparisons between different countries difficult or even impossible. Therefore, the decision to set the focus of the research on the Italian context, in order to control these possible biases in the experiences with second homes.
In order to still obtain a complete overview on the topic in this context, a variety in the respondents setting, location (see Fig. 2) and physical characteristics of the second home was pursued.

Since the respondents might be more prone to talk about their feelings and experiences and open themselves in their native language and considering the fact that some of the respondents were not really fluent in speaking English, the interviews have been conducted in Italian.

Fig. 2 – Locations of the rural second homes of the respondents
Source: ArcGis, adapted by the author

3.3. Interview Guide and Data Analysis

The interview guide (see appendix A) was constructed in line with the themes emerged from the literature review.

In each interview, the method of photo elicitation was used; it consists of using images and asking respondents to comment on them. In this case, interviewees were asked to provide one or more pictures of their rural second home or of their view from it. This interviewing technique is used in the field of social sciences and it is proven to successfully limit the intrusive presence of the researcher and to ease the conversation with the respondents by putting them in front of familiar elements. (Mannay, 2013).

Following a general introduction, in which the topic of the research was briefly explained, the first section of the interview focused on the contextualization of the second home in the life of the respondents; here more objective and general questions were asked.

After this, the theme of nature was tackled, in particular regarding the feelings of the respondents towards the natural setting of the house, the activities involving it and the importance of the second home as an escape element.

Finally, the themes of "home" and place attachment were investigated, relating them to satisfaction with the second home, the experience with its "inheritance" and the plans for the future in its regards.

Due to the COVID-19 emergency and to the social distancing regulation at the time of the collection of the data for the research, interviews were conducted through video calling platforms, namely FaceTime and Skype.
The data gathered was then analyzed and coded with the software ATLAS.TI. The coding has been created based on the theoretical framework and on the interviews themselves.

3.4. Ethical Considerations and Positionality

Respect of the privacy of the respondents in the process of primary data collection has been a priority in the project. An oral consent for recording the interview and using the data for the development of the research was asked in advance, in order for the interviewees to be as comfortable as possible in answering the questions. The aim of the research was thoroughly explained before the start of the interviews.
The personal data collected has been anonymized, through name alteration and the removal of names of specific locations. The data collected will only be used within this project and it won't be accessible to third parties at any future time.

In spite of the fact that I have access myself to a second home in a rural context and experience with it, this element was not shared with the respondents, in order to avoid them omitting or overlooking any possible consideration.
On my side, an objective stance has been maintained throughout the interviews, avoiding the expression of any judgement and showing understanding to the respondents.
The use of specific terminology from the field of geography was avoided as much as possible, in favor of more common terms.

4. Results

The analysis of the participants' data provided an insight into their experience in relation with a rural second home. While some themes present commonalities with what emerged from the literature, others present substantial differences and introduce new aspects that have been previously understated.

4.1. Rural Setting

4.1.1. Nature and Activities

In line with what emerged from the literature, the respondents recognized the importance of the natural context of the rural second home; they associated to it terms such as "quietness", "tranquility", and "peace". The senses that emerged being mostly involved in this exposure to

nature were hearing (by an appreciation of nature sounds or silence), and sight (through the view of natural elements and panoramas).

However, nature itself is not recognized by young adults as the predominant element in the experience of the rural second home. The benefits deriving from an indirect experience of nature (Cox et al., 2017) are only reported as marginal in the narrative of the respondents. The natural context of the second home is not experienced through a 'passive' contemplation and it is not valued as a passive backdrop for a healing and restorative experience, but it functions as the stage and the setting for performing outdoor recreational activities, which themselves are deemed extremely significant and beneficial.

"It is a very nice and really relaxing place. If you love nature and physical activities, even regardless of available infrastructures nearby, you can do a lot of things. With your bike you go riding and have the chance to see a lot around. You can practice many sports and do a lot of exercise. You have the chance to practice many activities and hobbies."- Anna

The setting of the second home, especially when experienced by the respondents for their whole life, is recognized to have deeply shaped their current interests and hobbies. For example, one respondent observed that growing up with a second home by the seaside nurtured in him an interest in kayaking and sailing, activities that give him feelings of freedom and happiness when performed.

"It is important to have a place from where you can explore around, even by yourself, where you can discover and take up hobbies, maybe in a deeper way, as it happened to me. For instance, my neighbor is very fond of skiing and his second house in the mountains enabled him to practice a lot, specialize and become a ski instructor." - Francesco

Overall, it emerges that the natural setting and the related infrastructures invite the respondents to be more active and to take up physical activity. A respondent stated that since when he started spending time in the family house in the countryside, he took up mountain biking as a hobby, since it is a popular activity in the area.

"In addition to a full immersion in wildlife, the house offers a variety of way to have fun, with many possible walks, ski areas, biking along cycle paths by the lake, bathing in the lake." - Valentino

"I usually do a lot of physical exercise there, much more than I normally do at my usual home. It is nicer, of course, when you can go jogging through Tuscan hills rather than in a town, no doubts." - Vittorio

Among the respondents, maintenance tasks at the house are generally reported to be less appreciated than what emerged from the literature. These works are usually perceived as a burden, rather than a form of relaxation and creativity (Walters, 2017). When asked what they would change in the house, two respondents reported that they would like it was smaller, as it would necessitate less work.

"We take much care of it as everyday the grass has to be cut, one day in the garden uphill, the next day in the lower garden. It is demanding. Actually I like doing gardening, but in that house I perceive it as a burden. However, this is because of my father's compelling me at such work, and this for the past 20 years ... so we won't blame the house for it." - Chiara

On the other side, specific maintenance activities were appreciated when it was not possible to do them at the primary dwelling or anywhere else. Gardening is usually appreciated more by those who don't have it at the primary dwelling, following the compensation hypothesis proposed by Dijst (2005) and developed by Norris & Winston (2010).
Furthermore, certain activities are actually fathomed for the "practical knowledge" they provide, that it would not be possible to gain with any other form of tourism.

"There I started doing some gardening, like chopping wood, things which I would have never learnt to manage if not in a context like that." - Vittorio

It just happened, we grew up just 'knowing' in which season peaches ripen, in which season grapes harvest is, which month you pick up blackberries, how often plants need watering .. things like that which you wouldn't easily get to learn otherwise.
- Laura

4.1.2. Escape

All respondents associated the rural second home with a sense of "escape". However, even if few reported that a break from the "city" is needed, the narrative of respondents in terms of escape is more centered on an "escape to" rather than on an "escape from". While literature reports escape from feeling of frustration and constriction associated with the city and the daily life (Chaplin, 1999), the view for the respondents is more positive, deeming both the daily life and the time spent at the second home as good and constructive. Nature stands out as one of the main themes of the "escape" idea, opposed to the physical characteristics of the urban environment.

"I love being in a city because I am a "city girl" [she smiles]; however, according to me, it is always necessary to take a break from time to time, getting away from the city, which suffocates you after a while….. It gives you the chance to take a breath of fresh air". - Chiara

The dichotomy rural/urban emerges also in the social and cultural characteristics of the places where the two homes are located. A common theme among respondents is the escape to a more rural way of living, driven by the lifestyle of the local community.

"Life there is a bit different; here everything is frenzied; besides, when I go there it's for vacation, therefore I myself have a totally different attitude….Everything is less frenetic. It even gets on your nerves sometimes, because you are not used to it. But as you are on holiday you tend to appreciate it." .- Anna

"It is interesting to see how these people, not born and not living in a town, are not used to hectic life, as we frenetic are".- Paolo

Overall, all respondents reported that not having a second home, would have made it harder to experience nature so often and for such extensive periods of time throughout their life. Although other options to get in contact with the natural environment (clubs, associations) were mentioned, all respondents agreed that no alternative could provide the same experience of a second home. Looking back at the experience of the rural second home in their childhood, the majority of the respondents mentioned feelings of "safety", "freedom" and "independence".

4.2. Second Home

All the respondents reported high levels of place attachment in relation to their rural second home. This theme was investigated through questions about the memories entailing the place, the hypothetical willingness to trade it for alternative houses or solutions and their future plans regarding the house, as previously done by Nouza et al. (2019).

4.2.1. Social Contacts

The main theme that emerged in the narrative about place attachment was the one of social contacts in the context of the rural second home, underlining a disproportion between the existing literature and the data collected for this project. While the social aspect is only marginally considered and deemed only one of the various side effects of spending time at the second home (Pitkanen, 2008), for young adults it represents one the major contributor to their experience and to a feeling of place attachment. The group of friends at the place of the second home often existed since the respondents were young, making it a stable presence even in their daily life year-round. In responding to questions on their activities while there, some interviewees responded using a spontaneous "we" rather than "I", portraying the experience at the second home as a collective one.

"Yes, I think it has been important also for all the relationships I have built, especially with some people I still currently keep in touch with and meet, not only in my summer vacation. Especially considering I was a only daughter, so in a place like that I could go out and get to know people, which definitely helped me a lot." – Carla

"Maybe the fundamental thing of having a second house, I reckon, is the network of acquaintances and friends related to it.. At our age especially, when you gain some independence, if you know that you are going to meet friends at your second house, you find it well more enjoyable." - Laura

Overall, place attachment to the second home is more rooted in social relationships and processes, rather than to the nature and landscape characteristics, as predicted by Hao & Long (2016). Still, the physical landscape holds importance to a certain degree, as Stedman (2011) proved that constructed meanings of places are not solely social but are dependent from physical characteristics of the context as well. The feel of the tourism experience is overshadowed by the sense of belonging to the community and the rootedness in it (Chaplin, 1999)

"For sure the social net I have built up was a very important factor. Friends I have in my second house village are very good friends of mine and I have shared many experiences with them. At the same time I associate good memories and great experiences with the place; however, beyond this, the place itself is charming, as I see it. So, I would weigh 70-30: 70 for friends and experiences, 30 for the place in itself." – Paolo

The second home was also reported to become more of a "social" place overtime, a space where to bring friends independently from the rest of the family, an experience to be shared with friends from the city in addition to the local friends. This aspect acquired new importance in the use of the second home while growing up and in relation to particular milestones in life, like getting a driving license. This possibility to use the second home independently with friends, contributed to a certain extent in creating a new meaning and a renovated level of appreciation for the house, which became the vehicle for new kinds of social activity and personal experiences.

4.2.2 Family

Another element contributing to a feeling of place attachment towards the second home is that it offers the opportunity to spend time with family members, while it is not always possible in the daily routine (Kaltenborn, 1998; Jaakson, 1986).

"We get up and have breakfast all together. It's a house where we usually have meals gathering together, we have this large table we sit around all together. If I think of my second house, what comes to my mind straight forward is us sharing and eating at this huge table." - Laura

"I would fancy it a bit larger, because when we go to our second house the whole family is there, so there is little space, with no much privacy. But sharing so closely is the good side of it, in a way." - Anna

4.2.3 Place Attachment

All the respondents reported high levels of place attachment in relation to their second home, valuing the memories and the experiences lived in that context.

"Many good memories I have are connected to this house, just the simple picking figs from the plant with my grandpa. It helped me to grow up happier, for sure." – Vittorio

"If I consider the bond created, it is one of 'my places', for sure, therefore I would keep it no matter what." - Francesco

"So, it would be nice to change a bit and experience travelling to different places. On the other hand, still, I would miss exactly this idea of having a home.". - Chiara

All the respondents, when asked about future plans in relation to a second home, were adamant in stating that they would like to own a second home. Even when faced with the cost of owning and maintaining one, and when comparing it to the numerous alternatives in the forms of tourism

and leisure, they still want to be seconds home owners, in line with the findings of Nouza et al. (2018) whose respondents would maintain a second home even under financial strains. It was considered of great importance by all the respondents that their own future family could have an experience with a second home in a natural context, and all it entails, as they had the chance to do.

When the houses presented an extensive family history and when major investments and works have been put in the house, respondents stated that they would like to keep that specific dwelling and possibly pass it on to the next generations, as predicted in the study by McIntyre & Svanqvist (2004).

For the other respondents the place attachment was more related to the social network developed in the place and to the typology of landscape; in this case the house itself was not the focus, but its location and context.

5. Conclusions

The research aimed to get an insight into the effects on the personal well-being of young adults of having a rural second home available to them. In order to answer the main research question, the aspects of the rural setting of the house and of the notion of second home were investigated as major components of the experience of a second home in the life of young adults.
Nature was reported to contribute to the individual well-being only partially as a passive background (Kaplan, 2001; Jaakson, 1986) but principally as the base for outdoor recreational and sport activities.

The natural environment still supports the theme of escape, which assumed a more positive connotation than the one given by Chaplin (1999). Rather than a flee, or escape, from the pressure, routine and constrictions of the daily life, it turns into an attraction to the rural setting and to the rural lifestyle, in order to take a break from the urban physical environment. Maintenance works on the secondary dwelling are perceived as a burden by young adults, instead of as a relaxing and creative moment (Kaltenborn, 1998), unless they provide specific knowledge or can only be performed in that context.

The levels of place attachment towards the rural second home are very high overall, thanks to the extensive memories and experiences related to it (Nouza et al., 2008; Williams & Van Patten, 2006). Albeit it is still considered as a place where to spend quality time with the family (Jaakson, 1986), the major motive of place attachment emerged being the network of social contacts among both locals and other second home users.

In conclusion, a rural second home, thanks to both the rural setting and the notion of second home, provides for young adults a unique set of feelings and experiences, not replaceable by any other form of tourism or leisure activity. In spite of occupying a relatively small fraction in the life, the availability of a second home in a rural context has a profound and extensive influence on the life of young adults, strongly contributing to and shaping their interests and hobbies, social networks, knowledge and skills and, ultimately, well-being.

The research sets itself in a research gap on the topic of second homes, nature and well-being.

As the qualitative research performed features and works with the personal experiences of individuals, it is difficult to take into account all the possible factors building this experience. The presence of bias given by parameters not considered but influencing the research is unavoidable.

The COVID-19 Emergency and the related travel restriction, together with time constraints, posed limitations to the data collection process. Otherwise, it would have been possible to collect and work with quantitative data too, contributing to the completeness of the project.

The self-isolation rules also negatively affected the interviews, conducted via video call. However, the photo elicitation method helped in better investigating the experiences of the respondents. The study was conducted within the Italian context, in order to avoid social and cultural biases in the phenomenon of second homes. However, this could set the base for future studies comparing the on a European and international scale. A longitudinal research could also examine the changes over time in the personal experience of rural second homes.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Each interviewee is asked to provide a picture of the rural home or of the view from it.

Introduction, brief explanation of the research topic and consent request.

Contextualization

-   Provide a physical description of the rural house and of its context.
-   Where is it? How far is the second home from your primary residence? Are you able to reach it independently or do you need someone to get to it?
-   How often do you go there? Do you usually go there by yourself? With family? With friends?
-   Who purchased the house? How long has it been in your family and how long have you been using it?

Subjective experience of the second home

-   In general, do you like the place? Do you enjoy going there? Why so?
-   Which activities do you normally do while you are there? Are they related to the natural setting?
-   Which feelings do you have regarding the natural setting of the place? Does it contribute to your wellbeing?
-   If you wouldn't have the house, would you be able to get out of the city, get to a rural area and experience a natural environment so often?
-   Looking back at your childhood, do you think that the second home played an important role in your development and your growth?

-   Do you feel attached to the place? What are the best memories regarding it?
-   Since you "inherited" the house as it is, would you change something in it? Do you feel satisfied about it?
-   Would you like to have a rural second home in the future? Would you like to keep this house specifically?