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BREAKING OUT INTO THE EVERYDAY

German Holiday-Home Owners in Italy

Daniella Seidl

The dream of living in the south is a dream many who live in the north have from time to time – and not just in Germany. We are all aware of the power of cultural images and ideas (Gerndt 1988) that feed our dreams and motivate our actions. According to a 2005 study by the Allensbach Institute of the material wishes of Germans, a holiday house or flat was the most desired (by 42.5 percent of those interviewed; see *Impulse* 2006: 12). Sun, sea and the ‘easy-going Mediterranean life-style’ have been the main summer traveling motivations for northern and central Europeans at least since the 1950s (Pagenstecher 2003; Bausinger 1996). An old southern farm house, surrounded by olive trees and with a vista over the hills, are not just the ingredients of which dreams are made, they are also a manifest contrast to everyday life in the north. And they are among the main props in dreams come true.

The term ‘second home’ connotes various forms of multi-locality “which all refer to a certain idea of use” (Hall & Müller 2004: 4). ‘Residential tourism’ (Casado-Diaz 1999), ‘summer migration’ (Finnveden 1960) or ‘seasonal suburbanization’ (Pacione 1984) are all efforts by social and economic geographers to find a more incisive definition (Hall & Müller 2004). Even the limited term ‘second home tourism’ that is mainly used in tourism research is variously defined. The term that I use here, ‘holiday home,’ is subsumed under ‘second home tourism’.

My contribution is concerned with presenting the specific experiences and practices of German holiday-home owners in Italy, and I use an actor-

centered perspective. The question of double homes/ double lives is the main focus, though issues of migration, trans-nationalization, and the connection to tourism discourse serve as background for the phenomenon being investigated.

Touristy ‘Alternative World’ or an Additional Space for ‘Everyday Life’?

The expression ‘double lives’ suggests a better quality of life, endowed with a range of possibilities. One’s life seems not only doubled but extended, increased, or even optimized. ‘Double life’ has another connotation, too. Leading a double life is mostly associated with split identities, whether in espionage or in the erotic double lives some people lead. Here, a ‘double life’ is something altogether different, a possibility of experiencing life in another, independent life space, an ‘alternative world’.

In what sense is ‘double lives’ an important motivation of holiday-home owners? Are they searching for an independent ‘alternative world’ with a compensating function that provides space to live out another, perhaps partial, identity (Keupp 1999)? Or do they wish to transport or extend their regular ‘life-world’ into another or quite different local context? Can both approaches be combined to produce a specific definition of the term ‘double lives’? During my research on German holiday-home culture in Italy in 2006, I spoke to and visited dozens of middle-class German home owners. Some of the residences were shared by two generations, others were owned by couples with small children who preferred

their own space over hotels. There were bachelors who wanted to pursue their wine-making hobby for a couple of weeks a year, and couples for whom refurbishing their home has become their substitute for having a baby, and self-employed women who in their holiday homes have discovered a comfortable distance from their families. Though these houses were as different as their owners, whether it was a small bungalow near the sea, a 'rustico' in the hills or a village home in a small town, there was one commonality: they were all created as a 'temporary life world' for a few weeks or at best a few months during the holiday season. New research on multi-locality has shown that the importance of a place does not necessarily depend on the length or frequency of use (Rolshoven 2006).

The Actors' Perspective: 'A Trusted Refuge'

In June 2006, on Elba, I met couple Z. from a south-western German city. Mrs. Z. is a freelance photographer and Mr. Z. works as a freelancer for television; both are in their late fifties and childless. For some years now, they have owned a small house at the edge of a remote village and spend the summer months there. They are close to the mountains on the western part of the island. Though they described their relation to their second home as secondary, as compared to their primary home in Germany, it still fulfils a very important function: "This is an additional life here, these are not two equal spaces. I would grade them according to the length of stay at each, about 40:60." In answer to my question: "Why did you create an additional life?" they say:

One gets into a routine, into a daily course [of life], and one wants to break out every year, [get away] from these petty bourgeois Germans, at least once every few months. It is a mental and physical breakout (...). ... It allows for a breakout into an everyday, into the habitual, into home (...) and yet it is not like at home. I feel different, yet incomplete. I am not a schizophrenic, but [it is] still a bit different, this is a feeling which is hard for me to describe (...); this is different from a journey where one is somewhere totally different,

a journey is different, these are not simply a few days or weeks. This is an extension to our lives, an extension to our home.¹

These experiences of 'breaking out' on the one hand and 'being at home' on the other are not in contradiction. Rather, the oscillation between escaping and coming home may be seen as an important motivation for holiday-home tourism.²

The tension between an 'alternative world' and 'feeling at home' upon arriving at a 'trusted refuge' appeared as well when I spoke with Mrs. S who has a house at the 'Lago di Garda'. For this forty-year-old single businesswoman who commutes between England, Berlin and Munich, this is the place where she can relax:

Something that's really mine (...) yes, really mine, this gives one a feeling of security and mental relaxation, yes, when nothing else works, I can retreat to this place, take refuge not in a negative sense but in a positive one, something to hold on to (...) to trust in.

Mrs. K. is a teacher and her husband an architect. For some time they have owned a house in the north of Marche near Urbino. Their three grown children hardly make use of this house, but the couple finds room for being creative here. He constantly renovates the house, she paints and writes theatre pieces for her students. For her, this is also her place to retreat and rediscover:

It is like a type of orientation to my present life, (...) orientation to retreat, (...) which one has for oneself, which does not have much to do with normal life; (...) there is something there; I am really far away and really with myself. If I did not have this I would not have this vision anymore (...) I could go to the south of France but there I do not get this feeling of being at home; I can rediscover myself.

In these examples, holiday-home tourism is constantly compared to other tourist experiences. The

interviewees all speak of going from one routine and landing in another, in their own space which belongs to them and to their 'life-world' that is shaped by themselves. It is a movement that connects the experiences of traveling with those of arriving at home.

This productive tension is also expressed in a quote of Mr. D. His family has three young children, she is a housewife, he a journalist. They are refurbishing a ruin in the south of Marche, and at the moment, the family lives temporarily at the building site during their holidays: "This is traveling, but not always to another place, but to one's own place (...) for us this is having our roots in two places."

The recurrence, the possibility of returning to the known, which is also part of one's own space, is an important characteristic of holiday-home ownership. The oppositional idea held by the actors becomes clear through their use of phrases such as 'holiday home as a refuge' and 'being at one's home'. They combine new experiences and spaces where both needs are meaningfully joined and integrated into their 'life world'.

Transformation and Modification Practices

To reach a scholarly perspective on multi-locality or bi-locality requires an understanding of function and motivation as well as inquiry into individual strategies of dealing with the special conditions of multi-locality. A second residence is a "chosen home, which we actively create and acquire" (Rolshoven 2006: 187). The "*vita activa* at multi-localities" (2006: 181) emerges through cultural and social practices. Actors bring some elements with them, transform or let go of them; to what extent the reality *in situ* has an influence remains to be seen.

Are there observable behavioral linkages that correspond to the productive tension in the emotions brought to home one as compared to home two? Is there a change between one and the other? How do actors react to contradictions and resistances of the actual place?

Consider the following example:

Mrs. A., single well-educated academic and in her late forties, has been living a 'double life' for

over ten years between Miesbach, a small village in Upper Bavaria, and Perugia. Whenever the newspapers report a temperature of over 20° for Rome – which tends to be in May – she goes to Perugia, staying until the first autumn rains reach Umbria. In the colder months, she writes for various German magazines as a freelance journalist, and through this is able to finance her life in two locales. I met Mrs. A. in Miesbach in the winter of 2006, at her rented traditional-style house on a farm at the edge of the village, and again in early summer in Italy, at her small village house with a view over the roofs of Perugia and the Umbrian landscape.

The Desire and Burden of Arriving and Leaving

Mrs. A. described her life at the two different locales not as another lifestyle; rather, she mentioned that each place gave her a different awareness of life. Mrs. A. finds her transnational commute between the two locales joyful; it allows her to distance herself from everyday problems and gives her different views of herself and of life. Having said this, she notes that this change of perspective only lasts a short while:

You turn on a switch and something new comes into your life. Had I lived only in Bavaria, I wouldn't be able to say "now I want to suddenly change my life, now I suddenly see other people, now I suddenly will go somewhere else"; one simply doesn't do that. This is the real stimulus, you experience yourself in a different way, you experience yourself differently with the others; clearly you are never an Italian, but my friends in Italy are also happy to see me, they get to hear completely different things, relate to other things. We speak about other themes (...); yes, one really experiences different things (...). In Italy, I am far enough from many things which worry me, I only need to get as far as Verona by car while driving south and those worries are gone (...). On the other hand, one cannot completely run away from certain things, but the worries and stress are further away, these I can leave in Miesbach. Not all [of them]; some of them accompany me too,

but somehow it is, all in all, relaxing, the worries about my mother are further away, she cannot press her urgent demands on me, this she cannot do from Bavaria.

The change between the two living spaces and circles of friends is not without problems, as both expect attention. Pleasing both often proves to be quite difficult. Mrs. A feels that moving between the two locales is very tiring. The inevitable distance between one and the other locale also changes her perception:

It is really difficult, other friends, the difficulty is really the fact that one is permanently leaving friends and then one needs to re-experience them, as they have in the meantime also continued their lives, and one needs to first update oneself and one's feelings. I try to keep contact in between by phone, but I am away for months. Leaving is also very hard; every time I leave, there is always something special taking place, a feast, a dinner and on exactly that day I'm not there. I therefore do not enjoy leaving, as at that moment it's always especially exciting, at least that's how I feel it (...), and when one arrives down there, one is often disappointed by something, as it is not the same as in one's memory. There is this scaffolding in front of the house or the street is just getting dug up (...); there is always such disappointment at the beginning (...). Then one slowly starts to take care of the uncomfortable things, to pay unpaid things (...) and when everything is nicely back in order, the plants in the balcony bloom again, one goes again and then one comes up here and the farmer has fertilized his fields and the whole house is full of flies and then one gets the feeling, "my God, it's not so nice here after all" but it is worth paying this price.

Ulrich Beck calls the division of life at two or more locales the "transnational place-polygamy" (Beck 1997: 129). It leads to new experiences of mobility and settledness in daily life, but the change also presents a challenge. He speaks of the need to have an "in-

ner mobility" (Beck 1997: 131–132), which demands spiritual and mental mobility as a cultural strategy. The possibility of acting in a mobile and multi-local fashion rests on social inequality. Although mobility nowadays seems to be a social norm, it still carries a distinctive demarcation strategy within itself, implemented between classes, ethnicities or gender (Welz 1998).

Mrs. A. can divide her life between two residences and can afford an extended break during the summer. At times, she also works from Italy, but her prosperity is sufficient to allow her to concentrate mostly on her cultural interests: reading, seeing the sights, and attending the Umbria Jazz music festival. Even though she is very aware of her luxury, for now her motivation to commute between the two locales and to get the best of both worlds is still greater than her wish to stay in one place. What remains open is what will happen when she becomes older; will this hinder her 'inner mobility'? Lived multi-locality contains a tension between "option and unreasonable demand" (Rolshoven 2006: 194). This works as a strategy for satisfying various interests and needs (Giordano 1984) as long as the advantages and disadvantages are kept in balance, or as long as the wish for variety dominates the wish for simplicity. Old age and sickness may be additional exclusion criteria.

Mrs. A. explains her balance as follows:

It only goes this way, those who want to have everything must carry the consequences and I think this is fair, one cannot on one side have the nice parts and on the other side have no burdens to carry (...); at some point in the future, I would like to have only one residence but I cannot imagine which one I should do without.

Images Brought Along: Italy as 'the Other'

As an art historian, Mrs. A. had not only studied the Italian Renaissance but had also visited Italy with her parents as a child and encountered the Italian way of life and culture. These acquired images of Italy led to her wish to have the experience of having a second residence in Italy and to at least try to partially participate in it through her holiday home.

To my follow-up question regarding what gave her a different feeling of life in Italy, she answered:

I have learned that this is positive, this picture that when ones drives over the ‘Brenner Pass’, the sun shines and everything will be easier, nicer and more comfortable. I grew up with this image, and it was also true (...); it is another attitude toward life, the climate helps a lot, the food too, it is simply different, a happier and more cheerful life (...). Here the fennel grows and this calamint, the wild peppermint with really small leaves and rosemary, I find these scents so wonderful and when one can simply walk out and collect them and cook with them, this is clearly a much nicer quality of life.

Italy acts as the idealised ‘alternative world’ for Germany, the association of Italy with ‘*la dolce vita*’ is a motif which goes back as far as the reports of German Romantics who traveled to Italy (Battafarrano 1988; Oswald 1985). It remains the main motivation of the middle class for traveling to Italy (Prein 2005). The rural areas of this ‘second world’ – used here as a provocative label for the rustic exodus that has hit central Italy – appear as a resource of space rather than a result of economic necessities. It is an archive that furnishes the images for the areas to retreat to that is employed by those coming from the ‘first world’ who can afford it. The gaze to Italy is therefore reduced to its culture and nature. Current social reality is ignored, while ‘traditional’ Italy still acts as the better ‘other,’ as a contrast and a backdrop for Germany.

In Mrs. A.’s imagination, too, the image of Italy as an ideal or better place that offers an easier when compared to her life in Germany, is lessened over time:

Initially, I was so deeply into the Italian stance that the German one was very far away... All in all, I have now reverted back. “In Italy I am only Italian”; I have given this up, because in the meantime I have learned to appreciate German virtues. In the beginning, one thinks that here everything

is nicer and much better and that this is paradise and that back home everything is grey and horrible, and then the whole thing turns around and one realizes that it’s not so bad back home after all (...). Yes, they also have their disadvantages, especially when one stays longer and is confronted with these bureaucratic problems, then one rediscovers that Germany has also its advantages.

The transported, romanticized ideals are brought back to earth through the everyday realities of Italian life. The place itself has a “context generating potential” (Berking 2006: 13), and even temporary, subjective local connections are integrated into the actual social, economical and historical context of the locale (Schmidt-Lauber 2005).

The change in Mrs. A.’s expectations after being confronted with Italy’s everyday realities had consequences for her daily life and practices:

Initially, I had planned to read only Italian books, now I pick up the one I would have read anyway. I used to read only Italian newspapers, so as to allow me to take part in Italian life, and now I realize I am really delighted to read a German newspaper, the other one is only necessary reading (...). I also do not only watch Italian TV, thank God, since I now also receive Arte (a German-French cultural station).

Routines Brought Along: One’s Own Habits

Confronting her expectations of the Italian lifestyle with the local realities led to a change in Mrs. A.’s way of dealing with life. She has returned to her everyday life and her trusted habits. She describes how she spends her time in Perugia:

I cook something, in the afternoon I take an excursion or go canoeing, I visit my friends, go to the cinema: actually nothing special, just normal life (...). I sometimes really laugh about this: in Perugia, I make my coffee as early as before, and read my newspapers, not really the same as here [in Germany], I do not get them, [and] I do not go to a café as the Italians do for breakfast. I want to

sit comfortably on my terrace with my own things and go through my normal routines and do my morning gymnastics (...). Yes, actually, is there something that I do differently? (long pause) Yes, siesta, because everyone does it here, there is no one in the street.

Individuals, not only in their daily mobility but also in their multi-local mobility, “are not on the way per se, they are on the way with themselves, with their images, their habits and their things” (Rolshoven 2006: 190). In this case multi-locality must be seen as ‘everyday life – multi-locality’. Mrs. A. also takes many things with her from Bavaria: foodstuffs which she fears, or knows, she will not find in Italy, books she is currently reading or music she is currently listening to, and nearly all her clothes. She says these things, and the habits connected to them, are very important for her but she also says she hasn’t yet come to terms with herself. She finds it difficult to take these things with her, and her behavior actually contradicts her expectation of having a different lifestyle and of living with the realities of this other locale:

One simply has these things. I always take the stuff I am currently craving with me to Italy, so at the moment I am going through this biological sheep cheese phase (she smiles) which I do not find in Perugia or at least I convince myself that I can’t find it, and somehow even believe I can’t do without it (...), so I always have too much of it, I would like to reduce this, this permanent dragging of stuff from here to there and vice versa (...) I should have learned that I need almost nothing, because I’ve noticed that when I am there, I wear the stuff I have there, things which I had newly bought and found really nice do not seem to please me down there. One dresses differently down there; there are times when my clothing inspirations are eccentric and other times one wears comfortable and simple clothes, as one walks around a lot. Besides, I do not have any stylish friends to dress up for, even for dinner one goes with the trousers one has on and a pullover.

Conclusion

German holiday-home owners in Italy, with their images and practices of a ‘double life’, neither extend their life-world and try to integrate the social realities of Italian life into it, nor are the conditions of the locales concealed by “imagining an ideal life” (Dubost 1998: 127) as another or better ‘alternative world’.

Family L., who has a holiday home on Elba, related what they brought with them from ‘their own’ place, their first home, and what of the ‘other’ exists outside of their second, holiday home:

One brings one’s family, with its structure, and life goes on in the other home; the dominant fact is that what we do is coupled with our life and our fulfillment in the community [here] (...). We put our household into this flat, in this flat we are we. Italy, this is something I experience when I do something outside of these four walls, when I leave my flat; on the other side of my door is Italy.

What is brought along conveys a feeling of ‘being at home’, though it is limited to the space of the holiday home that one can create and fill with ‘one’s own [familiar, German] everyday life’. Italy is outside of these doors and windows, and signifies the ‘other’. The locale has a double, alternating function, both as an idealized space for images and as a specific place one can have, but that cannot influence the images and the practices that have been brought along. The mental luggage, the routines and the idealized images of Italy combine into a specific experience. The temporary life world in the holiday home is not primarily as a ‘transformation’ but a ‘translocation’. It is like moving a “subjective world” (Kaschuba 1999: 126) into another location.

The tension between strange and familiar experiences is characteristic of these multilocal or bi-local life worlds. ‘Being at home in a holiday home’ allows for temporal retreats and participation in a different, idealized life in Italy, though while remaining protected by a trusted and repetitive lifeworld of ‘one’s own’. The holiday house makes it possible, allows this ‘breaking out into the everyday’, and must be

seen as meaningful materialization of both needs.

'Double lives' unify the experience of 'everyday life' and 'alternative world' in one space, as interviewees recognized. The persons I interviewed are aware of this apparent contradictions, which in fact are the most important motivation for holiday-home tourisms in it self. Mr. St., a single architect in a village house near Assisi, says, with a twinkle:

You will never be really at home in the village society but I find it wonderful when I come home, open the book I would like to read, listen to the records I want to hear, lie on the cushion I want to lie on. This can also be very nice, don't you think?

Notes

- 1 All interview quotes have been translated as closely as possible to the spoken German I recorded, leaving in repetitions so as to include the thought processes evident in speech.
- 2 The concept of "holiday as a refuge" (Enzensberger 2006) is a main point of discussion within tourism theory and the same goes for the associated term "counter world" (Köstlin 1995). Touristy spaces and experiences act here as a 'temporary counter-world'; vacationing functions as a refuge and compensation from everyday life. For some, the definition of tourism as based on exceptional experiences is a subject of great controversy (Spode 2005), some go as far as calling it a "counter-world fairy tale" (Köstlin 1995: 6). Holiday experiences and practices cannot be separated from basic social, economic and individual conditions, as one can never completely escape from social and cultural systems (Spode 2005). 'Everyday life' and 'holiday' are two aspects of a unit. They are not detached, as holidays themselves are always patterned with ritual, daily routines and recurrences (Gyr 1992). At best they are a "ritualized refuge" (Köstlin 1995: 6).

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