

Urban cottages – rural homes?

Challenges towards a more sustainable residential culture and the role of architecture

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TOPIC: ARCHITECTURE IN A RESOURCE PERSPECTIVE

Abstract:

The growth in the number, size and standard of second homes in Norway as well as in other European countries has negative environmental impacts and has thus become an issue within the sustainability debate. The article argues that the growth in second homes must be seen as part of changes within residential cultures in our time and that understandings of these changes are essential in order to reach a more sustainable development within the residential sector. It aims to provide a better basis for further explorations into the field of connections between understandings of home, architecture and environmental issues.

The article draws on an outline of theoretical approaches to residential cultures and of second homes research, as well as on architectural analysis of two contemporary projects, one second home and one urban housing project. The discussions show that the relationship bet-

ween diverse home arenas is complex and that there probably is a need to reconsider the theory that second homes represent an escape from urban everyday life. Concepts like rural and urban are blurred, privacy and withdrawal may be just as essential in urban residential settings as in second homes and community life seems just as relevant in vacation home settings as in urban neighborhoods. The role of architecture within the overall discussion of how to reach a more sustainable residential culture is thus a matter characterized by several contradictions that need to be further explored.

Keywords:

Second homes, sustainability, residential culture, housing architecture, escape theory

INTRODUCTION

During the last years, there has been a considerable growth in the number, size and standard of second homes¹ in Norway as well as in many other European countries. This has become an issue within the discussion of sustainable development, affecting not only the ecological dimension of the sustainability concept but sociocultural and economic aspects as well. Within this debate, second homes are mainly regarded as a problem. The growth within this sector has negative environmental impacts such as increased transport and demand of energy and material resources, effects on the ecological equilibrium of recreational areas as well as on visual and historical values of cultural and natural landscapes (e.g. Taugbøl et al, 2000, Gurigard et al, 2004; Velvin, 2004; Hille et al, 2007). The number of Norwegian second homes increases by more than 6000 annually (SSB, 2008a). While the average size of a cottage was 62 m² in 1983, new second homes in Norway are now typically larger than 100 m² (ibid) which implies that they have reached the size of average new housing units (SSB, 2008b).

The article argues that the growth in second homes must be seen as part of changes within residential cultures in our time and furthermore that understanding of these changes is essential in order to reach a more sustainable development within the residential sector. Technical improvements of buildings and means of transport are important, but without more structural changes in residential patterns, use of land and transport modes, the gains from technical improvements are most likely to be cut back. This is supported by the fact that energy demand in the household sector has more than doubled since the 1960s in spite of continuously more stringent building regulations and improved technical standards (Thyholt, 2006).

Literature states that second homes are strongly related to urban life and that one of the driving forces is the wish to escape temporarily from a stressful everyday life in the city. Contemporary understandings of home involve dwelling through multiple places. Home is not so much about belonging and investing oneself in one place but rather about connecting to different arenas with complementing meanings and practices. The article aims to discuss how further insights and perhaps reconsiderations of these theories are needed in order to gene-

rate architectural solutions and principles that may contribute to more sustainable residential cultures. It is meant to provide a basis for further explorations into the field of connections between understandings of home, architecture and environmental issues.

The article outlines theoretical perspectives from second home research which are seen as particularly relevant for discussing changes in residential cultures and discusses how these may relate to the quest for sustainability. Furthermore it looks into how contemporary residential cultures are materialized into architectural form through a study of two projects, a Norwegian second home project and a Danish urban housing project. The projects are studied and discussed as physical manifestations of the architects' and developers' intentions and ideas.

The article represents the initial phase of a newly started research project dealing with links between the strong increase in leisure-time consumption and sustainable development in which the second home phenomenon is one of several cases that will be investigated. The discussions and conclusions from this article will be followed up in the next phases of the research by investigations of residents' perspectives on the relationship between the various arenas of home.

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE RESIDENTIAL CULTURE – THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Residential culture has several dimensions. It could be described and analyzed from an architectural or urban form perspective as physical structures or from a social/socioeconomic perspective focusing on household and family structures, lifestyle, and patterns of living. It may also be approached through the interpretations and analysis of values and meanings of home. Rather than being one of these, residential culture is understood as the dynamic relationship between the three aspects: physical structures (buildings and their surroundings), socioeconomic structures (individuals, households, groups and society) and ideas, meanings and values. Each one of them are affecting each other mutually, contributing to a continuously changing situation. Values, attitudes and conceptions regarding home, family, environment, status etc. influence both how we design our residential spaces and how we use them. At the same time the physical structures and

our living habits affect our attitudes and ideas connected to residing. The understanding of transformations within residential cultures must likewise include analysis and interpretations of all three dimensions and their mutual interrelationship.

This dynamic understanding of culture is i.a. inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice and his concept *habitus* understood as a "structuring structure" where the structures are "schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class" (Bourdieu, 1977:86). According to Bourdieu, the layout and practice of the house are essential for individuals' appropriation of *habitus*:

".. through the intermediary of the divisions and hierarchies it [the house] sets up between things, persons, and practices, this tangible classifying system continuously inculcates and reinforces the taxonomic principles underlying all the arbitrary provisions of this culture" (Bourdieu, 1977:89).

Bourdieu conceptualizes the role of architecture, not only as a cultural expression but also in the process of continuous cultural modification. Gieryn (2002) however criticizes him for not taking sufficiently into account *human agency* both in "designing and defining building" (Gieryn, 2002:39). In his article "What buildings do", he speaks up for an understanding of a building both "as the object of human agency and as an agent of its own actors" (ibid:36) and "as simultaneously shaped and shaping" (ibid:41).

According to this understanding, architects, planners as well as residents have roles and indeed also responsibilities to act as shaping agents. At the same time the built environment itself may shape action and thus more or less directly influence residential cultures. While Bourdieu in his analysis of the Kabyle House (Bourdieu, 1973) finds that the dwellings in a traditional society like this were not results of conscious decisions, and that design was more or less taken for granted, Gieryn emphasizes what he calls *intentional action* when investigating modern buildings.

When it comes to the understanding of contemporary residential culture, some values, particularly those connected to the meaning of home are, however, deeply rooted in society and thus not easily modified. Many researchers have looked into this field and found that there exist certain common understandings of home conceptualized as permanence, continuity,

security, control, refuge, status, reflections of self etc (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Also when it comes to the materialization of these understandings, several values seem to be taken for granted. My own work on detached houses in Norway (Støa, 1996) shows that residents saw no need of explaining why they regarded the private, suburban house surrounded by a garden as the ultimate, ideal home: "It is as if this is the way to live" one of the informants told me (ibid:144).

To deal with the questions raised in this article, it might be a fruitful approach to identify on one hand deeply rooted (and often unconscious) meanings or structures (*habitus*) that change slowly, and other issues within a residential culture that might be easier to modify and shape. Architectural aspects are relevant in this context because they are changeable and perhaps represent the most dynamic dimension of residential cultures. The projects we will look at later on are both examples of architectural solutions which provide new interpretations of home. Blunt and Dowling (2006) would call it *new imaginaries of home*, and they are in line with Gieryn in the way they describe home as the relation between material and imaginative:

".. the material form of home is dependent on what home is imagined to be, and imaginaries of home are influenced by the physical forms of dwelling." (Blunt & Dowling, 2006:22).

Again we find support from social sciences in our assumption that architecture matters.

Second homes as part of contemporary residential culture

There are many reasons for the recent growth in second homes in Norway, as well as in many other western countries. The reasons include increased mobility, higher disposable incomes, more leisure time, increased interest in outdoor recreation and environmental awareness (Perkins & Thorns, 2006:72 referring to Gallent & Tewdwr-Jones, 2000). However, these aspects are not sufficient to explain why so many people choose to use their time and money on a second and sometimes even a third home.

Much of the international research on second homes has dealt with the meaning of and the motives behind second home ownership and this has been summarized in several recent writings (e.g. Hall & Müller (eds), 2004; McIntyre N. et al (eds), 2006). A main issue in

the discussion of second home meanings is that households “.. purchase second homes in order to achieve some dimensions of lifestyle that is not available at their primary residence” (Hall & Müller, 2004b:12). Behind this lays a desire to escape from everyday urban life with all its hustle and bustle as well as a longing for a more rooted life close to nature.

In studies on Norwegian attitudes towards urban living, Witoszek & Saglie (1998) found that urban residents state that practical issues were the reasons for choosing to live in the city, so that they might save time to spend time out in nature outside the cities in the weekends:

“Most of them have cottages. And as soon as they start talking about their cottages the talk becomes livelier. (...) One has a place in nature that is a home, a locus of identity and belonging. One resides in the city, but one lives in the nature” (ibid: 238, my translation).

This is also supported by recent research on second homes (e.g. Kaltenborn et al, 2005; Bjerke et al, 2006; Vittersø, 2007).

Quinn (2004) argues that, to be able to answer the question “why do people have second homes?” there is a need for considering how the meaning people attach to different places informs the decision to become a second home owner. Drawing on several earlier studies, she discusses how circulation between different places has become a normal part of contemporary lifestyles. It seems to be both possible and perhaps also natural to feel at home in more than one place. In this light, second home ownership may be seen as

“part of an adaptation to dwelling in modernity that relies on multiple belongings between two, or possibly more, places of residence. (...) second home ownership allows people to dwell in and through different places, enabling them to feel connected to more than one place at the same time” (ibid, 2004:117-118).

The globalization and high mobility that characterize modern society may lead to reduced significance of “place rooted localities” and weaken neighborhood ties and networks (Giddens 1991). The easiness of traveling both physically and virtually, affects our attitudes towards place and perhaps also our need for belonging. Alienation, insecurity and becoming rootless may be results of this, but surely also freedom, mobility, possibilities for a range of individual choices for gaining new experiences,

making new friends etc. Dislocation and placelessness are concepts used to describe the globalized society. Some theorists argue however that place and home still matter “..although sometimes in ways not previously envisioned” (Gustafson, 2006:22). The contemporary meaning and use of second homes, with their localities, can be understood in this context, as a way to adapt to a modernization processes (Kaltenborn, 1998). Quinn elaborates this a bit further by stating that second home for some

“... creates a means of re-discovering and re-connecting with places that hold special meanings in people`s lives, there serving to counter the sense of place-alienation and dislocation associated with globalization” (Quinn, 2004:113)

Still it seems that the relationship between primary and secondary homes – or between the cottage and the city – is much more complex than merely a “simple” duality where the quiet cottage in spacious natural surroundings is complementing the compact apartment in busy and noisy cities. The “escape theory” should probably be reconsidered since it seems that the escape also may be “.. an attempt to re-visit and rediscover experiences, times and places that create a sense of connectedness” (Quinn, 2004:118) or as cited in Perkins & Thorns (2006:76 citing Crouch, 1994:96): “escape becomes an escape for home, not just from home”.

Many modern second homes are no longer characterized by the simple life, quietness and closeness to nature as they used to be (Vittersø, 2007). We have lately witnessed great changes in the cottage cultures. Very few new cottages are built “out in the wilderness” far away from neighbors. They are often located in villages or even apartment buildings close to downhill slopes, hotels, shops, “after ski” entertainment, restaurants, and busy nightlife. With modern technology it is possible to bring work to the cottage and thus extend the period of use beyond holidays and weekends (Perkins & Thorns, 2006).

The tendencies described underline the fact that second home culture is not about *one* single trend, but that they play different parts in the understandings of what contemporary residential culture may be. The complexity calls for a broad exploration of the second home phenomenon seen in relation to the primary home and the residents’ attitudes towards urban as well as rural life and how diverse arenas supplement each other and together constitute multiple homes. To be able

to do that, we should also look into some of the architectural aspects of the phenomenon. Few studies have done this so far. Most relevant in this respect is perhaps research carried out in Oslo that indicates that access to private outdoor spaces and gardens in primary homes – which in fact are essential issues within debates on urban housing architecture – gives less long travels by car, and also that high density in housing areas contributes to more travels by air (Holden & Norland, 2004). An explanation is that people need second homes and / or travels abroad to *compensate* for an everyday life in dense urban environments with a lack of natural surroundings, largely in line with the “escape theory”. A relevant response to this would be to secure a better access to private outdoor areas as well as more parks and green areas within the city. But how can we be sure that this will work? Holden & Norland point out that the correlations need to be examined more closely as they may just as well have to do with the choice of urban lifestyles as with the physical structures and their limitations. And as we already have seen, the “escape theory” is only a part of the rationale behind our increasing wish for second homes.

NEW HOME ENVIRONMENTS – SOME ARCHITECTURAL ISSUES

Studies of architecture alone will not provide answers to the questions raised in this article but they may still contribute to provide a better basis to explore the connections between the diverse home arenas and the role of architecture within this whole.

Two projects are selected as examples of contemporary home environments. One of them consists of vacation apartments in a village in Norway, two hours by car from the city of Trondheim. The other is an urban housing project in Ørestaden in Copenhagen. They are not necessarily representative for what is being built today but are rather selected as unique cases, considered to embody ideas that might shed light upon the current discussion of multiple homes and thus give opportunities for learning (Stake, 1998). The architectural project is seen as a cultural expression: “...a *cultural project for change*” as Gromark (2000) puts it, and the qualitative interpretations are mainly based on written presentations of the projects by the architects and developers, as well as drawings, models, other visualizations and on-site visits². This will be followed up in later phases of the research of investigations of resi-

dents’ perspectives which are necessary to give a complete picture of residential culture.

“Hovdinntunet”

Architect: Skaara Architects AS, Oslo

Oppdal is a small mountain village with 6.500 inhabitants located between Oslo and Trondheim, 2 hours by car or train from Trondheim and 5 hours from Oslo. Oppdal has its main identity as a ski destination in wintertime. Recently there are, however, attempts to expand this to include summertime outdoor life and also more “urban” activities consisting of shopping, night life and cultural activities. Within the district of Oppdal there are 3000 private cottages.

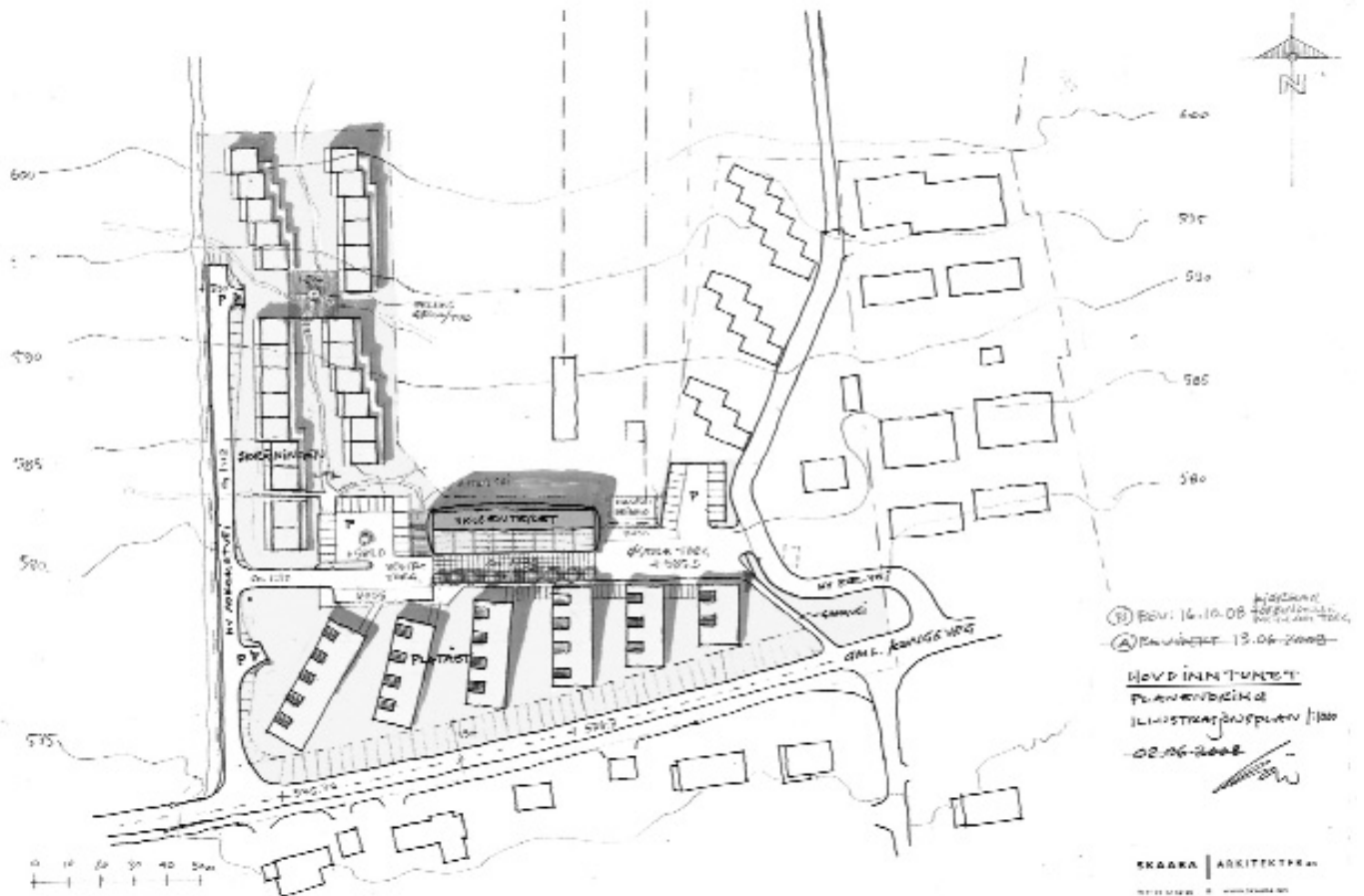
The Oslo based architect Kim Skaara has made a plan for a new settlement, “Hovdinntunet”, consisting of 138 vacation apartments close to the downhill tracks. One of the main objectives is to ensure the best possible relationship between the downhill tracks and the site, and to give priority to sun and view both in winter and summer. The central building will be a focal point within the building complex – seen from the access from the south and from the downhill slopes in the north.

In addition, the architect has put efforts into creating connections between the village and the new settlement and expresses a will to contribute to a positive development of Oppdal. The project aims to strengthen the urban fabric of the village, visually as well as functionally. The visibility between the village and the ski resort are cautiously taken care of. The shape and placing of the front building support openness between the village center and the ski resort. People on vacation are seen as means to urbanize the village. At the same time, the village offers “urban attractions”, believed to bring people to Oppdal. It is assumed that skiing, nature and outdoor life are not enough, implying that vacationers have changing preferences which should be met.

The architectural design of the settlement and the apartment buildings has a suburban character. Features typical to contemporary housing, are put forward: underground parking, sun and view, modernistic design (large windowpanes, flat roofs etc), plazas, street like passages and high density. The central building will have 6 floors, and thus become the highest building in Oppdal. In addition to service facilities for winter and summer tourists, it will have restaurants, shops, “after ski facilities” as well as 40 rental flats (ranging from 24 to 80 m²).



Figure 1 - 3:
Photos from the site at Hovden,
showing neighboring farms,
existing ski tow and recently built
vacation apartments.
Photos: Eli Støa



Owner flats (all together 98, ranging from 60 to 120 m²) will be established in the terraced buildings in the west and south with balconies and view towards the west and the evening sun. They will be placed to give as many as possible “nice glimpses” of the village center in the south. Some apartments will have large roof terraces. The outdoor areas are designed to achieve pleasant sun and view conditions as well as wind protected spaces for playing and outdoor activities. Centrally located within the settlement there will be two common outdoor spaces with bath tub, barbecue or other common facilities. A system of paths will connect this plaza to both the downhill tracks and the different parts of the building complex.

Environment friendly design features and technology will be integrated to secure reduced energy demand, the use of renewable energy sources and ecological water and drainage solutions. According to the project homepage, Norway’s largest solar collector is planned on the tilted south façade of the central building. Because of these features and the compact building, the project is highly welcomed by the local organization “Oppdal for the future” that

opposes the extensive recent development of detached cottages in the district. The large underground car parking space is, however, according to the architect, questionable in a sustainability perspective.

“VM Bjerget”

Architect: BIG – Bjarke Ingels Group

The newly completed residences on top of a man made mountain in Ørestaden in Copenhagen give the neighboring “VM houses” (PLOT Architects, 2005) an evergreen hillside as their new view. Eighty apartments are built diagonally on the top of a parking garage accommodating 480 cars with a sloping roof facing south. The large northern and western facades are covered by perforated aluminum plates with a huge photo of Mount Everest by the Japanese artist Osamu Uchida imprinted. This acts both as an artistic decoration and as a mean to ventilate the parking house.

“VM Bjerget”, described as a residential district “on top of Ørestaden”, consists of a dense structure of courtyard houses, each of them with a private, shielded garden. According to the website, the architects aimed to combine

Figure 4:
Overview site plan.
Illustration: Skaara Architects AS.
Printed with permission of the architect

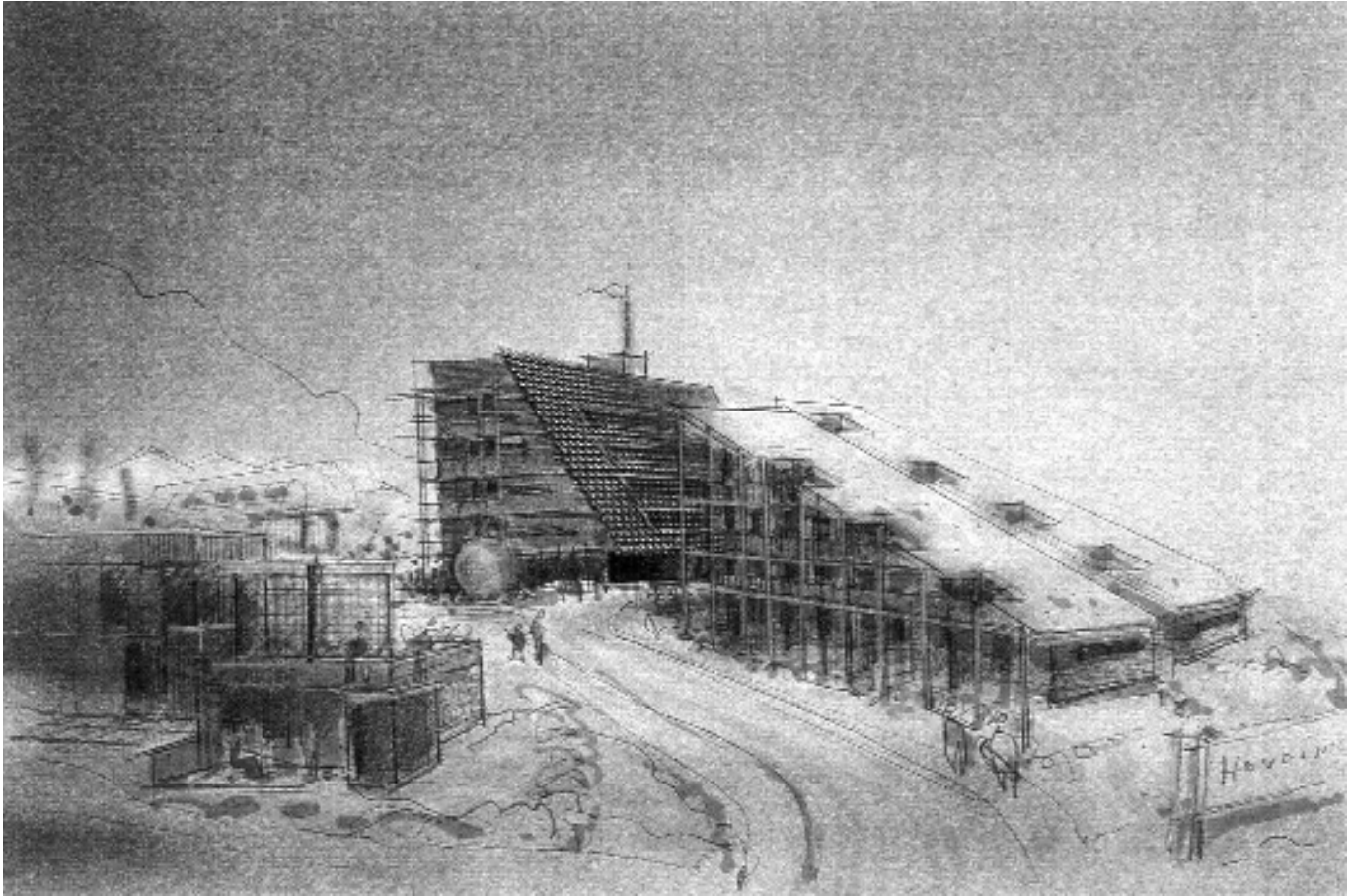


Figure 5 and 6:
 "...through its environmental friendly, modern and identity generating contemporary architecture give the district and region a push forward" [quotation from the web-sites <http://www.hovdintunet.no/>].
 Perspective drawings:
 Skaara Architects AS.
 Printed with permission of the architects.



urban lifestyle with "living in the green". The project offers "healthy and relaxing outdoor life in green surroundings". The "light and airy" apartments have views far beyond the villa quarters of Amager, all the way to the Øresund bridge and the Turning Torso in Malmø. It offers the better of two worlds: the proximity to a hectic city life in the urban center with rural tranquility. The apartments have large windows and glass sliding doors towards the south:

"When open the fourth wall disappears and dissolves the border between indoor and outdoor" (from web-side). Furthermore, the wooden terrace floor is meant to visually merge with the indoor floor, enhancing the dissolution between house and garden.

"VM Bjerget" is located close to Scandinavia's largest shopping center Fields, with a huge amount of shops and entertainment. It also has



Figure 7 and 8:
Drawing showing the space between "VM houses" (2005) and the new "VM Bjerget". The architect Bjarke Ingels was also involved in the design of "VM houses" as a partner in PLOR Architects.

The residences on top of a rendering of Mount Everest, "appearing as a cottage field" according to a Norwegian newspaper (DN, 2008)
Illustrations:
BIG – Bjarke Ingels Group.
Printed by permission of the architects

a close and efficient connection to the city center by metro. The railway station connects to the rest of Denmark and Kastrup airport just a couple of kilometers away to the rest of the world.

According to Bjarke Ingels, "VM Bjerget" represents a reaction against the "tyranny of squares" that has ruled in Copenhagen as well as many other large cities. Instead of placing a block of flats beside a parking house, he has placed one-storey flats on top of the parking house.

Discussion

The most striking finding from the analysis of "Hovdintunet" and "VM-Bjerget" is the similarities between the two projects when it comes to the qualities and values that are emphasized. This illustrates that primary and second

homes are not necessarily complementary but more or less overlapping arenas. View, sun, openness and sightlines to the urban surroundings and city (or village) center are highlighted in both projects. There is also a common focus on practical issues: "easy life" with car parking in the basement and shops and service close by. This, combined with an aesthetic attitude expressed by extensive use of glass and flat roofs, shows strong links to the modern movement. This is an interesting aspect of "Hovdintunet", since traditionalist aesthetics seem to have had a strong hold on second home architecture – even though comfort and technical standard may be very up to date. However, both projects have elements that may be characterized as "romantic". Most important is how they both accentuate "natural features" through the extensive use of natural



Figure 9:
"Where the apartments in "VM houses" were wild and distorted, the residences in "VM Bjerget" are far more traditional. We have created a villa quarter where the house merges with the outdoor space, worth noticing in a multi-story structure in an urban setting with a view over Amager, the Øresund bridge and with the Turning Torso in the far distance. One gets all the splendours of the suburbs in the city".

[Bjarke Ingels at the website: http://www.vmbjerget.dk/my_translation/]

Photo: Jakob Boserup.

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materials like wood and stone, the greenery on the southern façade of "VM Bjerget", and the emphasis of the natural surroundings for "Hovdintunet". Both projects are thus expressions of modern suburban values within settlements of relatively high density. This may be regarded as an example of a shift towards more urban second homes, while for "VM-Bjerget" this rather reflects a shift "backwards" towards more rural qualities in an urban setting.

Another similarity, related to the aesthetic appearance of the building complexes, is the strong aesthetic distinctiveness both projects have, represented by the high rise central building with a huge solar collector at "Hovdintunet", and the Mount Everest art work at "VM Bjerget". Both may be seen as examples of a conscious endeavor to express images that will attract attention and symbolize new, astonishing and perhaps also contrasting or controversial meanings in their unlike contexts. In Ørestaden, "VM Bjerget" represents not only the suburban dream, but also the dream of undisturbed, fresh, healthy, withdrawn life in the mountains. While this may in fact be regarded as an ironic comment on Danish residential values, "Hovdintunet" has a

more serious approach: high consumption of land, even in our scattered country and mountainous districts, is not any longer acceptable. A compact building structure - 6 floors is regarded as high rise in Oppdal - and a striking solar panel visible from a long distance communicate a comprehensible message in this regard.

On the other hand, there are some significant differences between the two projects. One concerns the activities supported by the physical structures. For "VM Bjerget", peace and tranquility as well as the withdrawal from the hectic city life are focused upon. The architect and developers promote values that are similar to the ones traditionally associated with second homes. When it comes to "Hovdintunet", there are no words on withdrawal, peace and quite. On the contrary, the website presentation rather emphasizes the positive "hustle and bustle" of an active and sportive leisure time. This does however not imply that possibilities to experience the peace and quietness associated with closeness to nature are not important. The reason that these qualities are not mentioned when it comes to second homes in the mountains.

While protection of the private sphere is a main issue in the promotion of "VM Bjerget", more focus seems to be put on public life in "Hovdintunet". Several meeting places and common facilities for outdoor and indoor activities are established here in order to support the social life of the vacationers. In "VM Bjerget" the parking house is the only common space. Even though the space between the new building and "VM Houses" is presented as a lively pedestrian area (see figure 7) there are no functions along this area that might support "lively activities".

"VM Bjerget" represents in some respects innovation when it comes to urban housing³, but this is related to the architectural expression (the image of mountain dwellings on top of a parking house), and to the density of the structure rather than to housing typologies. The flat layout is a rather traditional courtroom plan similar to Utzon's "Kingo Houses" or "Fredensborg" (Møller et al, 2004) and many of the values they represent are the same as the ones embodied in much of Nordic post-war suburban housing. As such it represents more conventional dwellings than the neighboring "VM Houses" does (Møllerup, 2006). Both "VM Houses" and "VM-bjerget", like many other new housing projects in Ørestaden as well as in other cities, are characterized by being designed and planned as independent objects, rather than as structures integrated in an urban fabric and contributing to the surrounding public life. The lack of interest in the "life between building" (Gehl, 1996) is perhaps also a part of the heritage from the postwar suburban housing developments, and may in hardy be regarded as "new". What is new is that, even though there is no conscious attitude against establishing common arenas, the architectural solutions as well as the socio-economic realities seem to counteract visions of public life. "Hovdintunet" may be regarded as more inventive at least in the context of architectural typologies for second homes in a rural setting, both aesthetically and regarding the area layout with public spaces, common activities and connections to the rest of the village.

Looking into the architectonic issues of the two projects, we may rather simplistically conclude that while "Hovdintunet" represents an urbanization of cottage life, "VM Bjerget" represents a ruralization of urban life. It is thus not obvious that second homes are designed as retreat from the noisy and stressful life in the cities. It may just as well be the contrary: they are

intended to let us "escape" from our protected privacy in an urban residence to our second home village to live an active and social life together with family, friends and neighbors, or we may seek similar qualities within different contexts and independent of this being within the frame of leisure time.

When life in urban dwellings is designed to be more quiet and withdrawn than what is intended in modern vacation villages, we must seek other explanations than the earlier mentioned theories of escape or compensation to describe the motives for the recent growth in second homes. More relevant reasons may be related to lifestyle changes involving increased mobility (Holden and Norland, 2004) and what seems to be a continuously more blurred relationship between urban and rural life, between leisure and work and between need for privacy and withdrawal and visions of rich community lives. The study thus fits well with the suggestion from Kaltenborn (1998) that second homes not only should be regarded as an escape from certain aspects of modern life but also represent a search for a more flexible lifestyle where

".. life revolving around the recreation home can gradually become the ordinary life that provides the desired meaning, while the modern, urban life represents the extraordinary existence"
(ibid:133).

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

How then may we use the findings from the study of the two new projects, related to the theoretical perspectives drawn earlier, as input to the discussion of how architectural solutions and principles may contribute to more sustainable residential cultures?

The architectural examples support the conclusions from the theoretical discussion that the "escape theory" needs reconsideration. The projects furthermore illustrate the complexity in the relationship between primary and second homes and thus the need for a broader exploration involving other dimensions of residential culture. After all, we do not know to what degree the residents at "VM-Bjerget" and other urban housing areas seek retreat in second homes, and if so: on which basis? Similarly, we have no information of who the buyers and renters of flats at "Hovdintunet" and similar projects are, why they choose this kind of second home environment and what kind of primary homes they have.

The architectural solutions in the projects are based on the architects' as well as the developers' interpretations of future residents' needs and preferences. If they are right, in the sense that the projects are materializations of "*what home is imagined to be*", as Blunt & Dowling (2006) put it, the study may in fact give some optimism for the future. It implies that there is an openness among people towards architectural solutions for second homes that in a sustainability perspective probably are much better than large cottages scattered in the wilderness, as well as for dense urban housing in stead of detached houses and urban sprawl. This again would imply that efforts put into technological improvements of the buildings and infrastructure could be feasible, and perhaps also that it might be possible to create even more future-oriented solutions when it comes to energy solutions, materials and transport than we find in our two examples. By creating projects that appear as alternatives to conventional solutions, architects and developers may contribute to the shaping of a more sustainable residential culture.

However, when it comes to the need of changing more fundamental structures of a residential culture, it is more questionable how architecture may have a shaping influence. If we had believed strongly in the "escape theory", an obvious strategy would be to affect the need and use of second homes by improving the qualities of urban residential environments, e.g., by providing better access to private gardens, parks and green areas, possibilities for withdrawal and refuge from the hectic urban life, place attachment etc. The article has shown, however, that the motives for second home use are much more complex than just the need to escape from a hectic urban life.

As contemporary residential culture is not about one trend but rather about a magnitude of patterns and meanings, this is probably the case for the motives for second home use and ownership as well. Influencing this in a more sustainable direction requires not only one strategy but many, also when it comes to architectural solutions and principles. Trying to counteract the need to escape urban life every weekend by architectural means may be one of several actions.

Creating housing environments that answer to contemporary needs and at the same time deal with serious environmental problems requires the search for a balance between the meanings

of home deeply rooted in our culture, and the changing understandings and patterns of everyday life. The aim for this article is not to prescribe answers or solutions. In addition to raising questions and providing a basis for further explorations, it might hopefully also inspire architects and developers to take their role as shaping agents of residential futures seriously and seek situations and opportunities for what Gieryn (2002) calls *intentional action*. Instead of believing that architecture does not matter, and that modern life heads in one direction - towards increasing placelessness, alienation and unsustainable consumption - we should to a larger degree question contemporary trends and search for alternatives. On the one hand, this could mean improving qualities in urban housing, in an environmental perspective as well as in supporting homecomings and place attachment for those who seek options to "nomadic lifestyles". And on the other hand, there is a need to develop and offer alternative solutions for second homes that meet a broader spectre of the various motives people may have for wanting them and at the same time meet the requirements of a sustainable built environment.

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NOTES

¹ Second homes include in this context cottages, summerhouses and vacation apartments in rural or peri-urban areas.

² The presentation and analysis of the projects are based mainly on the websites <http://www.hovdinntu-net.no/> and <http://www.vmbjerget.dk/>. Other sources are: powerpoint presentation made by the architect Kim Skaara on Hovdinntunet for a conference for architects at Oppdal, April 2008, an interview on telephone with Skaara, June 2008, a visit to VM Bjerget in March 2008 and a lecture given by Henrik Lund, one of the architects at BIG Architects, statements from the

architect Bjarke Ingels on diverse websites, and newspaper articles about both projects. "Hovdinntunet" is still at the planning stage and detailed layout of buildings or apartments is not available. It is planned to be completed in 2011. "VM Bjerget" will be completed during 2008 and the apartments there are now for sale.

³ This is supported by the fact that the project won the award for best housing project in the "World Architecture Festival" in Barcelona, October 2008: www.worldarchitecturefestival.com

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