

Valuing water: Perceived differences in attitude and usage between permanent residents and second-home owners in an island setting

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Abstract

The recent explosion of second home development in tourism areas around the world is a reflection not only of the increased mobility of capital and people associated with the effects of globalization but also the development models employed in many tourism destinations that link real estate development with amenities such as golf courses, marinas and ski infrastructure. Second home residents have differing patterns of use of their properties to those of permanent residents and the literature points to differing attitudes and values between these two groups that may result in conflict (Hall and Müller, 2004). Furthermore, Gartner (1987) concluded that although second-home owners may be sensitive to the environmental conditions and potential impacts of their activities, their behaviours suggest that they do not recognize their contributions to these conditions and impacts. In this paper we examine perceived differences in attitudes and use of water resources between permanent residents and second home residents in an island setting in order to identify sustainable approaches to regulation and management.

Small island settings are especially vulnerable to problems of water quality and supply especially in coastal zones (Gössling, 2001) Second homes are often located in such areas and high occupancy rates frequently occur during drier seasons (Essex, 2004; Ioannides, 2002), thus making sustainable water management a priority. Further, saltwater intrusion into fresh water aquifers can be induced by the exploitation of groundwater through overpumping of wells along the coastline, particularly during drought conditions (Calvache & Pulido-Bosch, 1997). As Puczko and Ratz (2000) observe planning and policy for water management can be informed by the perceptions and attitudes of permanent and non-permanent residents.

We explored these issues in a case study of Mayne Island, British Columbia, Canada, one of the Gulf Islands lying between Vancouver Island and mainland British Columbia. Mayne Island has a permanent population of approximately 1,000 residents. During the summer months, the population escalates to between 2,500 and 3,000 residents, particularly on long

weekends. There are a variety of fresh water sources used by Mayne Island residents, some use private wells whilst others are served by 12 community- organized Water Districts that manage distribution from reservoirs. As with other Gulf Islands, there are concerns on Mayne Island about adequate water supply in periods of peak demand.

Using key informant interviews and an on-line survey of permanent and second-home owners we examined differences in water use behavior, attitudes and values. There was a perception amongst some permanent residents that their seasonal counterparts may be decreasing availability and sustainability of water resources. However, some informants suggested that permanent residents tend to have a greater need for exterior water use for gardens, pools and hot tubs, than second-home owners. Others perceive that, due to the lesser amount of time they spend on the Island, second home owners are less conscious of their use of water for such things as laundry and showers and are less likely to install water efficient services such as low flow toilets. There was a perception that lower awareness of the need to conserve water occurred between those that were connected to a water system rather than using a private well. Despite these perceived differences in how the two groups value and use water resources, the survey results suggest that there is little difference in actual use of water resources. However, second-home owners are less engaged in community management of water resources primarily because they are not so readily able to engage in management meetings.

Overall, it was concluded that water conservation awareness and education needs to increase amongst all residents of Mayne Island. Recommendations for engaging both permanent and second home residents were proposed that would not only serve to make all residents aware of the necessity to manage their water use in a more sustainable fashion but also help resolve any tensions relating to concerns by some permanent residents that second home owners did not appreciate the need to conserve water.

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