

Entry

# Cottage Culture in Finland: Development and Perspectives

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**Definition:** This entry provides an understanding of the past, present, and future of the Finnish cottage culture to create an overall picture of its development trajectory and its terminology, e.g., villa, in this context denoting a second home. Convenient, ready-made solutions, easy maintenance, a high level of equipment, year-round use, location, and modern and simple architectural styles are important selection criteria for (summer) cottages that belonged only to the wealthy bourgeois class in the 19th century and have taken their present form with a major transformation in Finland since then. Additionally, municipal regulations and increased attention to ecological concerns are other important issues regarding the cottage today. Cottage inheritance has changed over the generations, and the tightening of building regulations and increased environmental awareness are key drivers of the future transformation of cottage culture. Moreover, the increasing demand for single-family and outdoor spaces created by social changes such as remote working, which has become widespread with the COVID-19 pandemic, will make the summer cottage lifestyle even more popular in Finland. It is thought that this entry will contribute to the continuance of the Finnish cottage culture, which is essential for the vitality of countryside municipalities, local development, national culture, and the well-being of Finnish people.

**Keywords:** (summer) cottage; second home; (summer) villa; holiday home; Finland



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## 1. Introduction

Second homes, rooted in ancient civilizations, differ conceptually from region to region and culture to culture [1]. In many countries, people have a second home to access the geographical and cultural benefits that their primary property cannot give them. Among the major factors that make owning a second home attractive, is the desire to be in a natural environment, the search for an authentic atmosphere, or the inclination towards a countryside lifestyle [2]. In this sense, second homes are preferred not only by the privileged group but also by many people as weekend getaways in Nordic countries [3]. Partly as a consequence of the prosperity and abundance of the region, Scandinavian people generally buy a second home in the rural areas. Likewise, in countries like Turkey, second homes in mountain regions are used by many people as part of their culture to avoid the hot season in the summertime. For this reason, the importance of global borders are being lessened and second homes are gradually gaining an international dimension [4].

The Nordic lifestyle is closely linked to nature and the highly anticipated but short-lived summer season [5]. The most popular and ideal way to spend the summer months in Finland is in a lakeside cottage surrounded by nature [6] (see Figure 1). This tradition is grounded in traditional culture and lifestyle and forms an important part of the Finnish national landscape [7]. Many Finns consider the cottage to balance out city life [8].



**Figure 1.** The typical view from a lakeside cottage plot in Finland (Photo courtesy of Hüseyin Emre Ilgın).

‘Cottage’ is the best explanatory translation of the Finnish term ‘mökki’, a word with a robust cultural value for Finnish people, which is widely used in everyday life and formal contexts. The term has many meanings, from a humble cottage to a luxury villa like a ‘second home’. A ‘cottage’ (see Figure 2) is constructed on a permanent basis and is defined as a residence used for recreational or leisure purposes [9]. The term ‘summer cottage’ is widespread and understood in Finnish, but it literally refers to dwellings used only in the summertime and is often linked to simple inhabitation. Additionally, terms that are functionally related to their meanings, e.g., holiday home, are mainly used for more official purposes and refer to leisure and vacation uses. Furthermore, second residence or second home is a common and modern notion that does not limit the use of the house as a term only for the holidays or a certain period of the year. In this entry, the term second home or place of residence is used to refer to a particularly well-outfitted year-round-use cottage.



(a)



(b)

**Figure 2.** Cont.



(c)



(d)

**Figure 2.** A cottage from the town of Ikaalinen, Finland: (a) entrance; (b) open kitchenette; (c) fireplace; (d) exterior view (Photos courtesy of Jenni Vilkmán).

In the Finnish context, second homes play a vital role in the expression of the country's cultural landscape [10], illustrating the significance of outdoor leisure and conventional activities [11]. A large segment of the Finnish people defines second homes as very valuable [12]. Additionally, the second home in rural municipalities is critical to the regional economy and has considerable job potential in Finland [13]. Second homes and tourism potential have also been the focus of academic research for a long time and have become an established part of leisure time in various countries [14–20]. Both in Finland and internationally, second homes have become not only an essential part of people's leisure pursuits but also entire lifestyles [21].

The summer villa trend that started in the 19th century represented a model of luxury living that belonged only to the elite in the early years of Finland's independence [7]. Originally built near cities, the earliest ancestors of these cottages later spread to the coastlines and countryside. As industrialization increased in cities, holiday homes offered an escape to the natural environment. In the 1950s, spending time in the cottage became the pastime of almost all Finns, and in the 1980s cottage construction increased and reached its peak. The number of cottages in Finland at the end of 2018 exceeded half a million [9,12].

The size, comfort level, and prevalence of use in the winter months of the cottages, whose ownership is gradually transferred to new generations, is increasing [22]. In addition, global factors, e.g., the sharing economy, flexible working practices, and increased environmental awareness due to climate crises, also significantly affect the Finnish cottage culture [19]. Restrictions on coastline building and new wastewater guidelines are on the agenda among Finnish cottage owners [23]. On the other hand, although the interest in Finnish cottages still seems high, inherited traditional cottages located in Finnish forests are at risk of deterioration and are struggling to respond to changing trends and needs.

Wood, which has never lost its popularity among construction materials, has always been the most common construction material in cottage architecture [24]. Cottage buildings and newly built holiday homes are almost entirely wooden, 70% of which are log buildings (see Figure 3) [25]. Wood is considered a natural, warm, and ecological material that is compatible with the Finnish landscape [26–43]. Features such as breathability, moisture balance, allergy friendliness, and esthetics are other prominent benefits of log construction [44].





**Figure 3.** Log cottage example from northern Finland (Photo courtesy of Lotta Häkkinen).

Governance, development, mobility, and tourism are among the most discussed topics in the existing literature, terminologically based on the second home. To date, there are limited studies in the literature focusing on the Finnish cottage culture, which is of great social and economic significance for Finland [45].

The social aspect of the cottage phenomenon is accepted as one of the most critical dimensions and is associated with the themes of maintaining social facilities and infrastructure, increasing community welfare and social capital, and placing the commitments of second homeowners in the Finnish context [13]. Additionally, second home users are an important summer population group in various parts of Finland, creating demand for regional facilities and can be involved in community life and local politics. Considering the economic significance of the cottage culture in Finland, especially for countryside municipalities, multiple residences have a substantial effect on the regional economy and the second home provides significant business potential. In this context, second homes often make a large contribution to local economies, and this is especially significant as the population declines in countryside areas [13]. Other significant encouraging economic effects of second homes can be listed as follows: tax revenues to the local municipal economy, alleviating or rising estate prices, generating new jobs, creating new investments, and attracting new tourists. Thus, the cottage industry, which can be considered a historic initiative merging economic and cultural-political efforts in an institutional framework, is mainly defined as an economic activity that encourages an entrepreneurial and self-sufficient lifestyle in the countryside [46].

This entry focuses on the past, present, and future of the Finnish cottage, which together form an overall picture of the cottage's development trajectory. In doing so, it identifies the aspects of change that affect the architecture and usage patterns of Finnish cottages and assesses the possible prospects and their impact on cottage construction and cottage architecture at a generic level. The entry also clarifies the terminology used, e.g., second home, summer villa, in this regard. It is believed that this entry will contribute to the continuation of the cottage culture, which is critical for the vitality of rural municipalities, local development, national culture in Finland, and the well-being of Finnish people.



## 2. Literature Survey on the ‘Second Home’ Concept

As mentioned above, the second home is a common and modern notion that does not limit the use of the term to houses only occupied during holidays or a certain period of the year. ‘Secondary dwelling’ is progressively used as a corresponding phrase for the cottage. Second homes and secondary houses are referred to in leisure housing and media studies, but with frequently differing definitions [13,47]. The second home can be considered as a supplementary dwelling next to the primary house. On average, regarding the annual use of second homes, Scandinavian countries generally show an active pattern: they were reported to be used 75 days a year in Finland, 71 days in Sweden, and 47 days in Norway [48]. Second homes in Finland play a significant role in representing the national landscape [10], reflecting the significance of outdoor leisure and traditional activities [11]. Second homes and tourism are an established element of leisure in various countries and are the subject of scholarly studies (e.g., [15–17]).

There are a limited number of studies on the Finnish cottage culture, but there are numerous studies on the concept of a second home. Notable studies include Häkkänen et al. [49], who researched Finnish cottage culture from an experts’ point of view through interviews, in which the main findings were based on key themes, including cottage buyers, characteristics of dream cottages, diversified cottages, the regulation of cottages in municipalities, and challenges in the regulation of cottages. Overvåg [50] explored the link between second homes and urban growth in the Oslo area, Norway. The study showed that second homes and urban growth are connected to some extent, but regulations by the government preclude a stronger link. In addition, Overvåg’s work highlighted the impact of land scarcity and demand changes, noting that urban growth is one of the factors affecting the location of second homes owned by Oslo residents. Müller et al. [51] conducted a survey among Swedish holiday homeowners examining the relationships between vacationers and the Swedish countryside. The survey results showed that today’s leisure accommodation business, do not considering settling in vacation home permanently. However, there were signs that residential use would increase, indicating that the boundaries between second homes and permanent residences might disappear after a while. Hiltunen and Rehunen [52] scrutinized the leisure-based mobile lifestyle between the urban home and rural second home in the Finnish context, mainly via GIS data and questionnaires. The results showed that social changes such as urbanization, modernization, rural restructuring, distribution, and mobility, as well as historical events and government decisions at different levels play an active role in second home tourism. Rinne et al. [53] examined second home management from the standpoint of public participation, using three group discussions focusing on three cottage-rich places in Finland. The results demonstrated that the traditional approaches of cottage owners are increasingly supported and reconfigured by heterogeneous and diverse second home users. The Finnish Environment Institute [13] analyzed how citizens and municipalities perceive the situation and development of second home tourism. While revealing that second homes play an important role in both leisure mobility and rural areas, the report underlined the views of Finnish municipalities that second homes contribute positively to regional economies.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, urbanization trends have changed, and the importance of housing conditions has increased drastically [54,55]. In the post-epidemic world, people began to prefer low-density rural areas over high-density urban centers [56]. In this context, the pandemic is an important social phenomenon influencing the meaning of ‘second homes’ and, in its initial stages, second homeowners thought of them as an escape from urban areas where the virus was spreading more wildly [57]. Shortly after the outbreak of the epidemic and the closure of workplaces, schools, and restaurants, people began to flee to their second homes as a better spot for isolation. Consequently, second home use has extended beyond the leisure industry and into ‘protection from epidemics’ to ‘favored remote workplace’ [58], as in the cases of Russia, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and France [59–61]. Furthermore, people focused on domestic tourism as many national borders were closed during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic,

second homes have become a more significant form of domestic tourism in many countries where a significant proportion of people have access to a second home, particularly in rural areas, as in the cases of the Nordic countries, Southern Europe, Russia, North America, and Australia [62]. In addition, outdoor areas, e.g., gardens and balconies, are encouraging leisure activities such as gardening, which were beneficial for well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic [45,52,63,64]. Thus, these crucial changes and new demands in daily life contribute to the importance of studies on cottage culture.

There are many studies on the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on second home ownership and tourism. Among the major studies, Zoğal et al. [57] examined the epistemic progression of the concept of 'second homes' and revealed possible consequences that could place second homes at the center of tourist activity. They concluded that in the initial phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, second homes were moving from high-density urban areas to low-density rural areas and a probable transformation in tourist preferences could place second homes at the center of tourism activity as soon as travel limitations were lifted, which could increase current housing commodification procedures by strengthening residential platforms. Pitkanen et al. [62] analyzed the safety of second homes during the COVID-19 pandemic in various locations, e.g., Sweden, Finland, Canada, and Russia, and found that even though the second home cultures of different locales may differ, in general, people were utilizing their second homes for escape and safety during the pandemic. Bieger et al. [65] discussed the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and second home prices in Switzerland, and the results indicated a considerable price increase in second homes—especially compared to flat prices—after the onset of the pandemic.

As can be understood from the literature review above, the concept of a second house, which has an important place in cottage terminology, is a research topic that has increased in importance and popularity in Finland and many other countries, especially with the pandemic. The next section will discuss the development, current status, and future of this important topic in the Finnish context.

### 3. Cottage Culture in Finland: Past, Present, and Future

Despite strong traditions, Finnish cottage culture is a relatively new phenomenon. Its development from past to present is summarized below [49,66]. The summer villa trend, which started in Finland in the 19th century, in big cities such as Helsinki and Turku, was only for the wealthy bourgeoisie. The number of villas, which was 1000 at the beginning of the 20th century, exceeded 3000 in the next two decades. These villas, which were the product of the urban culture of the past, were large and ornamental structures that only urban families bought, mostly used in their spare time during the summer months.

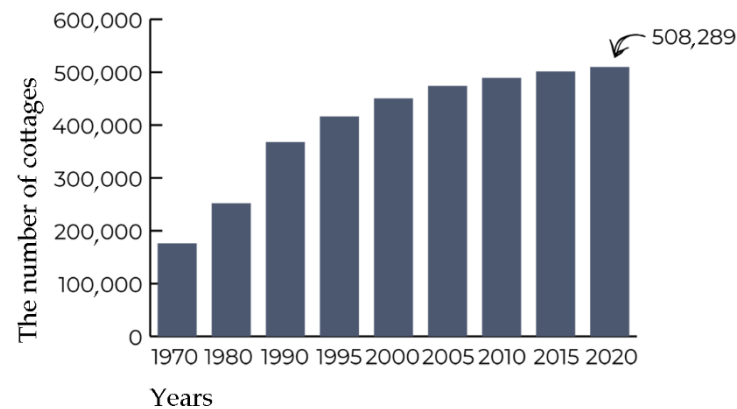
Towards the end of the 1910s, that is, after Finland gained its independence (1917), the effort towards modesty and practicality in the villas built in that period was striking. In the 1920s, cities' populations doubled and the search for summer residences expanded even more. With the widespread use of buses and private vehicle transportation, distances were no longer an obstacle to the purchase of villas, thanks to the rapidly developing transportation. By the late 1930s, the number of villas in Finland quadrupled to more than 20,000 by 1940. Extravagant decoration declined, and villas began to imitate detached houses in suburban areas, where gardening was an important part of life. Smaller weekend cottages were also being built in greater numbers than before.

By the 1950s, spending time in the summer cottage became a nationwide activity that could be experienced by the entire Finnish population. In those years, many people born in rural areas migrated to cities to work mostly in industry, which accelerated the increase in the number of summer cottages with urbanization. Simple summer cottages and weekend cottages began to become more and more common, and cottage ownership spread rapidly in rural municipalities. The size and equipment standard of the villas lost their importance and emphasis on access to the open air and nature allowed for more modest cottages.

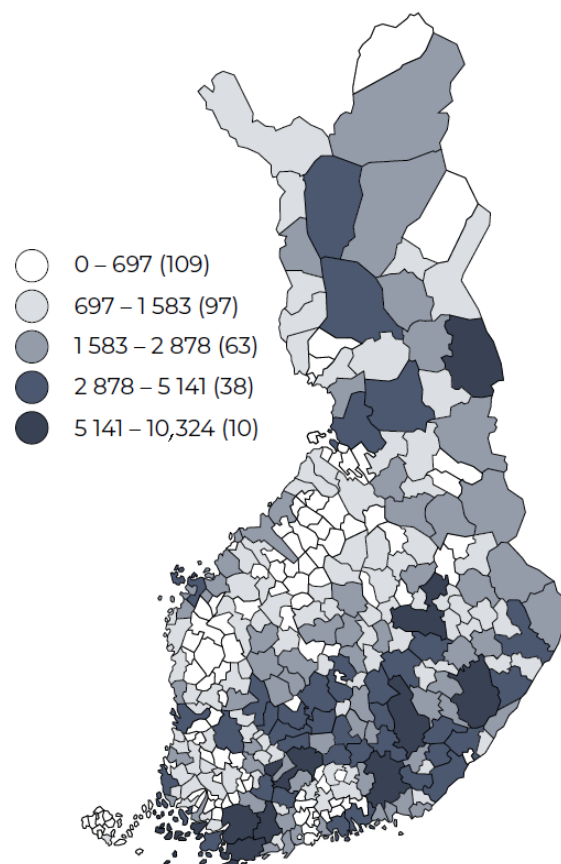
However, in the 1960s, the opposite trend developed, namely summer cottages that were spacious, well-equipped, and could replace a second home for the family to use

throughout the year. In those years, the time spent at the summer cottage increased at the weekends, as Saturday was a day off, and the number of villas exceeded 100,000, with one out of every 13 households owning a summer cottage.

In the following years, the number of summer houses continued to increase, and growth peaked in the 1980s, with more than 100,000 new cottages constructed over ten years. Cottage construction has slowed since then, only increasing 23 percent in the 1990s, and at the end of 2020, the number of cottages reached nearly 510,000 as shown in Figure 4 [67]. Additionally, cottage distribution on the basis of municipalities is indicated in Figure 5 [68].



**Figure 4.** The number of cottages in Finland (1970–2020).



**Figure 5.** Distribution of cottages by municipalities in Finland.

Today, about fifty percent of the Finnish population regularly visit a cottage [3], and summer cottage owners are only one part of this group. Grandchildren and children often



use their parents' cottage, and about three million Finns travel to these homes at least once a year [68]. Even though cottage preferences vary according to socioeconomic status and income level [47], Finnish cottage culture remains widespread throughout the country. Given the demands of key stakeholder groups, particularly contemporary consumers, who play a crucial role in understanding the current state of Finnish cottage culture, the following stand out, as stated in Häkkinen et al. [49]: (i) convenience, ready-made solutions, easy maintenance, the high level of equipment, year-round use, location, and modern and simple architectural style were among the main selection criteria in cottages, which were generally preferred by a wealthy buyer profile over 50 years old; (ii) dryland cottages were also evaluated as a possible alternative to waterfront cottages, due to their advantages such as ease of access to services; (iii) environmental issues were among the topics that buyers were interested in; (iv) when certain requirements were met, municipalities with different approaches and procedures to the cottages showed positive attitudes towards coastal development, regarding recreation areas where building rights and wastewater treatment come to the fore; (v) there were some regulatory barriers to meeting user needs, e.g., watered toilets in cottages that could be converted into permanent residences under certain conditions.

Considering the above-mentioned current demands of cottage buyers, modern, comprehensively equipped holiday homes designed for year-round-use are likely to become an increasingly important part of the future. Due to the limited selection of affordable and suitable waterfront properties, the many inland countryside houses may become an alternative for future cottages. It is thought that the younger generations especially will be more prone to such second homes, which are different from the traditional lakeside cottages. Additionally, rental cottages and other less binding forms of holiday homes will likely continue to gain popularity. The cottage will likely be further modernized in the future. However, there are also some ways that cottages which are too traditional could be changed. Identifying these and combining them with the demands and requirements of modern cottage owners is likely to increase the popularity of cottages.

On the other hand, it can be predicted that the increasing demand for detached houses and outdoor use, which has developed as a reflection of the COVID-19 pandemic, will further expand the summer cottage lifestyle. The serious price increase in second homes in Finland after the epidemic also supports this expectation. Remote work, spending more time in a second home, and therefore the increasing demand for houses with larger gardens to be more intertwined with nature, will significantly affect the Finnish cottage market, which will push the demand for year-round-use cottages to a much higher level than before the pandemic.

Table 1 summarizes the cottage culture in Finland from past, present, and future perspectives.

**Table 1.** The evolution of Finnish cottage culture.

The Evolution of the Finnish Cottage Culture		
Period	Terminology (Mostly) Used	Featured Notes
The 1800s	Summer villa	Villas, large and decorative buildings designed for the wealthy bourgeoisie, for leisure and summer use, began to grow around big cities.
1900–1920	Summer villa	The number of villas, which was 1000 in the early 1900s, increased to over 3000 in the next two decades. After the independence of Finland, modesty and practicality came to the fore in villa designs.
The 1920s	Summer villa/residence	Thanks to rapidly developing transportation conditions, distances were no longer an obstacle to the purchase of villas.
1930s & 1940s	Summer villa/residence & (weekend) cottage	By the late 1930s, the number of villas in Finland quadrupled to more than 20,000 by 1940. Extravagant decoration became even less popular, and villas began to imitate suburban detached houses. Demand for smaller weekend cottages increased.

**Table 1.** *Cont.*

The Evolution of the Finnish Cottage Culture		
Period	Terminology (Mostly) Used	Featured Notes
The 1950s	Summer/ weekend cottage	Spending time in summer cottages became a nationwide activity, and with increased urbanization, the number of cottages increased rapidly. The size and equipment level of the villas lost their importance.
The 1960s	(Summer) cottage	The cottages, whose number exceeded 100,000, were starting to turn into year-round-use second homes that were spacious and well equipped.
1970s & 1980s	(Summer) cottage	The number of cottages continued to increase, and growth peaked in the 1980s, with more than 100,000 new ones built within a decade.
The 1990s	(Summer) cottage	Cottage construction slowed, increasing only 23% in the 1990s.
The 2000s	(Summer) cottage	At the end of 2020, the number of cottages exceeded half a million.
Today	(Summer) cottage	Equipment level, year-round use, and location are the main selection criteria for cottages, which are often bought by people over 50 with a wealthy profile. Municipal regulations and environmental concerns are other important issues.
Future	(Summer) cottage	Demand for the well-equipped year-round-use cottage will increase. Inland cottages will be an alternative to lakeside properties. Less binding types of cottages will continue to gain popularity. The epidemic will further expand the summer cottage lifestyle.

#### 4. Conclusions

This entry concentrated on the past, present, and future of the Finnish cottage, which together form an overall picture of the cottage's development trajectory. In doing so, the entry identified the aspects of change that affect the architecture and usage patterns of Finnish cottages and assessed their possible prospects and impact on cottage construction and cottage architecture at a generic level. It also clarified the terminology used, e.g., second home, summer villa, in this regard. The main purpose of this entry was to contribute to the continuation of the Finnish cottage culture, which has undergone social, cultural, and architectural changes throughout its transformation from summer villas used only by the elite in the 1800s to summer cottages used by all Finns today.

Although cottage life is becoming less and less like the traditional concept of spending long summer weeks in a modest cottage, it still holds a special place in the hearts of the Finnish people. Finns' interest in cottages does not seem to be waning, but the ways of implementing it are changing. The ease of solutions and maintenance of the cottage, as well as the flexibility of use, are important for buyers. In addition, the number of contemporary, well-equipped summer cottages suitable for year-round-use will continue to increase in Finland. The contrast between permanent urban residences and holiday homes remains the main reason Finns flee to cottages.

The generational change of cottage owners, tightening of building regulations, and global megatrends, such as growing environmental awareness, are key drivers of the future transformation of Finnish cottage culture. Additionally, as one of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing demand for cottages for single-family and outdoor use, created by changing priorities, such as remote working and spending more time in a second home, will make the summer cottage lifestyle even more popular in Finland. To preserve the cottage phenomenon, which is culturally and economically important to Finland, sustainable solutions must be developed to meet the wishes and needs of modern cottage owners and regulatory requirements.

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