A coalition for 'small tourism' in a marginal place: Configuring a geo-social position

Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt [a,*], Lars Fuglsang [b], Jon Sundbo [b]

[a] *Department of People and Technology, Roskilde University, Denmark*
[b] *Department of Social Sciences and Business, Roskilde University, Denmark*

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses a case of mobilisation for 'small tourism' where a coalition of actors in distant rural communities unite to cope with limited possibilities in ways that are meaningful to them. The theoretical bases for the analysis are resilience theory and the concept of geo-social position, the latter of which implies a reorientation to an 'earthly' commitment to the environment where people live 'down to earth' (Latour, 2018). The case study focuses on the coastal hamlet of Lildstrand, a marginal place in Northern Jutland, Denmark, whose permanent population and fisheries are in decline. Since 2017, a coalition of locals and second-home owners have mobilised for several parallel initiatives, including a series of development workshops and other events, a master plan for Lildstrand 2030, plans for the extension of a national park, new small-scale tourist designs, mass-media presence, and various lobbying for development. It is a case of citizen-driven tourism where a coalition of actors enthusiastic about the place seek slow and modest tourism activities, drawing on resources belonging to the area and its natural and cultural heritage. Key findings include how engagements emerged from familiarity with, detailed descriptions of, and plans for the local environment, and how the coalition managed to come about by uniting voluntary work across permanent and temporary residents as well as other actors committed to developing the location. Common to the commitments of this coalition is the relationship and engagement with the local environment as a common good. We suggest that the making of the coalition should be understood as a configuration of a geo-social position that is central in driving the mobilisation. This research illuminates general conditions and possibilities for the development of rural communities in peripheral regions. There is a need to collect knowledge on how different types of tourism can be used to help actors address local needs in such areas.

1. Introduction

This paper deals with 'small tourism', which is the development of tourism in local communities that prioritise their own well-being over increasing tourism. While tourism is often seen as the sole development of peripheral communities, tourism-based rural development can be accomplished in very different ways. We argue that small tourism is appropriate to understand the development of tourism that involves neither top-down planning nor business-entrepreneurial goals, but is community driven. Using a case study of the coastal hamlet of Lildstrand in Denmark, we describe and systematise a process of developing small tourism and explain the community processes that lead to this development. Small tourism in Lildstrand is based on utilising the natural environment. Thus, communities' and tourism's relationships to nature are central aspects of our analysis and are approached theoretically in the paper. Our analysis provides an example of the trend that rural development is increasingly associated with tourism development.

Relying on rural development to cope with population decline and the loss of resource-based industries is a complex problem for which tourism is often suggested as a solution. In this paper we move beyond overall and structural perspectives on rural development to focus on how people engage in practices to effect change, including specifically designing tourist attractions that focus on or take advantage of the natural environment of a particular place. This includes the engagement of not only the permanent population of small rural communities but also second-home owners who are 'neither casual visitors nor permanent residents, but something in-between' (Tuulentie and Kietäväinen, 2019: 1). Thus, multiple people and practices engage in rural tourism development in a particular place, including people whose primary residence is elsewhere. Therefore, the 'local community' mobilised to act is not

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given in advance, but is defined through the processes and formats of people engaging with developing the particular place. We approach this process as a configuration of a 'geo-social position'. Engagement can generally be described as dynamic processes that reflect the willingness of actors to do something together in a community (cf. Thévenot, 2007; Brodie et al., 2019). Mobilisation is then tentative acts that motivate, involve, join, and facilitate actors to develop concrete actions. In this paper we focus on diverse formats of engagement that define acts of mobilisation.

While this paper is positioned within the stream of local community studies, which developed particularly from the 1950s to the 1970s (e.g. Lynd and Lynd, 1957; Frankenberg, 1965; Brox, 1966, 1972), we readdress the understanding of local community development in contemporary times characterised by global urban centralisation, mobility (Bærenholdt, 2007), the dominance of services and the experience economy (Sundbo and Sørensen, 2013), and the general decline of distant rural communities, including depopulation, falling relative incomes, and the deterioration of social activities. The paper is based on one in-depth case study of Lildstrand, a small peripheral rural community in Denmark that has developed small tourism. The analysis explains how tourism initiatives can help actors deal with marginalisation. How is it possible to turn such a decline into a revitalisation process? Who can create this process, and how? This case study demonstrates how the inhabitants are able to create development within the community by engaging with small tourism, which in many cases is the only means to turn the situation around. In this case, collaboration between the permanent inhabitants and the temporary inhabitants (i.e. summer-home owners, or 'second-homers')—forming a type of entrepreneurship embedded in the local community (cf. Johannisson, 1987)—has been a core factor in the development process. Thus, the scientific contribution of this study is the deep understanding of how tourism activities might enable locals to achieve the successful revitalisation of such communities.

The paper relies on data and observations from our participation in a citizen-driven mobilisation for developing 'a bit more' tourism to make a small and marginal coastal hamlet livelier for the inhabitants and second-homers, thereby avoiding the town's liquidation. We are interested in the forms of engagement (Fuglsang and Nordli, 2018) that drive the entrepreneurial attempts to develop small tourism. Observing these careful kinds of engagement, involving diverse actors that develop small tourism, led us to consider this as a case of resilience practices in tourism (Innerhofer et al., 2018; Saarinen and Gill, 2019). Here, resilience implies the robustness of communities that cope by developing a durable format of small tourism. Resilience hints at how social or societal units are able to absorb, adapt, and cope with change and crisis, but resilience approaches tend to take these units or communities as homogenous, closed units without investigating the processes and practices that form them and their relation to place. Hence, we suggest that the more concrete aspects of *how* a community of multiple participants is formed as a kind of engaged coalition relating to the local environment is crucial for practices to become resilient. The resilience in this case was not an existing phenomenon, but was developed through a process, inspired from outside (i.e. the researchers), of initiating the development of the community in ways that reflected the actors' engagement. Before this process, there were some tensions and very little interaction between the year-round inhabitants and the second-home owners. This is the process of configuring what Latour (2018) describes as a 'geo-social position', which we suggest investigating in more detail through the forms of engagement involved in the configuration. However, these engagements are defined in relation to the aim of the rural development effort in which they are engaged. In this case the aim is small tourism. Therefore, the next section develops the concept of small tourism; then, we return to advance understandings of resilience, engagement, and geo-social positions.

2. What is 'small tourism'?

Small tourism means the development of limited tourism in a community. Tourist activities are not conducted on a large scale with heavy investments, but on a small scale, often exploring the existing natural environment, buildings, history, and local storytelling. The goal is to develop the community for the permanent and temporary inhabitants, not (primarily) to boost the tourism economy. In this way, small tourism may unite second-home owners and locals around a common development strategy of sustainable tourism. It is development that preserves the idyll of the local place while also leading to small, rural development projects that may be important for the liveliness of the local society. For second-home owners, small tourism may create a more interesting place to visit; for locals, it can attract tourists to create more life in the community, more jobs, and more stable housing prices.

Small tourism improves inhabitants' daily lives, the quality of second-homers' repeated stays, and the experiences of other tourists without requiring the substantial development of tourism installations that would change the physical and geographical structure of the place. Although 'small', it nevertheless contributes to creating an overall experience in a region that tourists may enjoy. Small tourism is somewhat ignored in tourism research and in rural studies, but it has implicitly been a part of the increased interest in second-home development (Farstad and Rye, 2013; Gallent, 2015; Hall and Müller, 2018; Tuulentie and Kietäväinen, 2019).

Crucially, small tourism is more than just a compilation of tourist products. We argue that small tourism must be understood both as a product and a process. Specifically, the processes forming attractions, products, and so on have value in themselves because it is essential that local people are engaged in their implementation (i.e. these processes must strongly link to peoples' willingness to participate). This implies that small tourism is established for purposes other than business, and that it contributes to the local quality of life individually and collectively. Therefore, *how* small tourism is enacted is significant; thus, we focus our research on the processes of implementing small tourism practices. Overall, the aim of the analysis is to understand and conceptualise the practices and processes driving small tourism and making it resilient as a local community project for rural development. We especially target strategies of engagement with the environment through coalitions between locals and second-homers.

3. Engagement with the environment: resilience practices and the geo-social position

Aiding the search for the 'good life' and the 'common good', small tourism is often intertwined with specific environmental features that also attract buyers of second homes (Hall and Müller, 2018; Farstad and Rye, 2013; Huijbens, 2012). Small tourism can thus take place around, for example, coastal areas, lakes, or mountains that attract the types of people who enjoy small tourism. There is thus a vulnerable balance between the protection of and access to these features, where 'small' embodies a kind of precautionary principle. To understand how small tourism takes shape in vulnerable localities—including Lildstrand—our first conceptual inspiration comes from resilience thinking. Resilience has been used to understand how communities cope with vulnerable positions and situations, overcoming dichotomies between nature and society and suggesting bottom-up, endogenous, and empowerment approaches (Kokorsch and Benediktsson, 2018). Resilience perspectives are not one approach, but rather a family of ways of thinking about and analysing how actors, communities, and the like cope with meeting disrupted contexts and uncertainty. Resilience practices can thus be understood as careful steps used to stabilise a community, and we show how engaging with small tourism may be such a resilient practice.

Resilience draws attention to how societal units are able to cope with crises: '"Resilience" is described as a strength and ability which enables societies to maintain their social and ecological balance in times of crisis

and failure' (Fontanari and Kredringer, 2018: 14). It involves a 'focus on internal strengths, existing resources and authentic potentials' (Fontanari and Kredringer, 2018: 15). Specifically, resilience contributes to our understanding of this topic by helping us focus on the capacity of societies or communities to absorb disturbance through reorganisation (Saarinen and Gill, 2019; Zacher, 2018). This said, there are still basic questions about how, for what, and for whom resilience is created (Zacher, 2018). One basic issue of rural development is 'the capacity to organise and configure distance' (Young, 2006: 253), where resilience practices may not only be about disconnecting a community and increasing distance, but also about integrating distant actors and resources into the community.

Dredge (2019) scrutinises various uses of resilience in tourism and destination development and asks fundamental questions: Is resilience only for humans, or for more than humans in the Anthropocene, or sometimes only for capital (e.g. neo-liberal economic development)? Addressing issues of governance, she also questions whether Destination Management Organisations' (DMOs') territorial organisation makes them suitable for enforcing actions towards resilience. Taking a human-centred social science and economic-geography approach, Haisch (2019) investigates the challenges to collective agency in developing a tourism destination (one much larger and more professional than Lildstrand) and finds that 'shared concerns and perceptions' together with 'agreed informal values' and existing institutions are important for the success of a community that is coping with both environmental and economic challenges (132).

In this paper, we apply resilience in relation to practices of citizen-driven mobilisation for small tourism. This suggests an interest in *how* things are done and how a development process can create more collaboration in a community. These practices are connected to place in their engagement with specific geographical and material environments. A study of the various reciprocal, associational, and market relations involved in local mobilisation for tourism in a small Danish town concluded that the approach to citizen-driven mobilisation had to see 'place […] as the rotating shaft at the centre of all relations' (Bærenholdt and Grindsted, 2021: 108), where the material place in the form of the environment also has a certain force of action (i.e. 'place agency', Laursen et al., 2021, or 'actor power', Nyseth and Pløger, 2015).

To understand the role of place and the material in the practices we explore, inspiration can come from Bruno Latour's relational materialist approach to how a society is 'performed through everyone's effort to define it' (Latour, 1986: 275). Thereby, we also address Dredge's (2019, see above) question of whether resilience is only for humans or also for non-humans in an Anthropocene era, where the futures of societies and of Earth are no longer separate questions. Latour (2018), in his book Down to Earth , argues that the 'Earthly' (*le Terrestre*; i.e. the inescapable place where we live) is a new political actor—beyond not only global–local dichotomies but also physical and human geography—since our milieu is no longer only one of several possible external environments, but integrated with life as it is. The climate crisis implies new power relations and struggles about what Latour calls the 'geo-social positions' of people with their given environments and requests for living and reproduction. In this orientation, people first and foremost have to *describe and register* how their earthly environments are composed and change to create *geo-graphies*. However, the question remains: How do people become engaged in a place and in developing it?

These inspirations suggest an approach where environments play an integrated role in practices. A broader social science understanding is necessary to go beyond more technical approaches to resilience practices as something broader than crisis (e.g. flooding) management or psychological approaches to individuals' capacities to endure. Such a perspective comprehends resilience practices as actions taken by people with and within the environment where they live, not necessarily because of an acute crisis, but as a strategic action to avoid future crises. An important point in our analysis is that resilience can be developed through a process, particularly if the process is strategically driven, has a

common goal, and commonly accepted leadership emerges. In this perspective, resilience is about forming alliances or coalitions between people who engage in struggles over habitable soil and who share material conditions of existence (Schultz, 2020); resilience concerns the mobilisation of these engaged forces in developing concrete actions to enable a durable way of life. As we discuss, resilience can rely on more or less narrow and strategic forms of engagement.

Latour and his fellow researcher Nikolaj Schultz explain that the geo-social position is about how 'you are in' the territory in an open and moving place with relationships to other places (Latour et al., 2019: 218); the geo-social position can be identified by its 'territorial position defined by access to means of reproduction' (Schultz, 2020: 311). However, in our approach the geo-social position should not be defined only by local forces or 'politics of propinquity' (Amin, 2004) since people can also be thrown together in a geo-social position through 'politics of connectivity' (Amin, 2004) integrating actors and forces across distances. Still, Latour and Schultz concentrate on ontological issues and do not help us much in analysing the more precise practices and spatial organisation involved in the politics of 'doing' geo-social positions. As we outline in the methods and analysis sections below, we find the forms of engagement, developed by French sociologist Laurent Thévenot (2007; see also Fuglsang and Nordli, 2018) helpful in analysing in more detail how resilient practices are created in a geo-social position. In comparison to Latour, we thus agree with Blok (2013) that 'Thévenot is the more cautious theorist' (498).

The 'Earthly' approach suggested by Latour and his colleagues has already been described as promising in relation to tourism (Huijbens and Gren, 2012). However, the more specific orientation towards geo-social positions and to places (Latour, 2018; Latour et al., 2019) suggested here adds a new direction to this perspective, congruent with various recent developments focusing on place and the local in tourism research (Førde, 2014; Gibson, 2021; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Kastenholz et al., 2020; Richards and Russo, 2016). Richards and Russo (2016) argue that, with recent trends in tourism, including peer-to-peer systems, there is a rise of the local and place where 'the division between tourist and local will become much less tenable' (p. 254). While these practices are now observed in larger cities along with Airbnb and the like, we argue that second-homers have already played that role in rural areas for a while. In her relational approach to tourism in marginal areas, Førde (2014) suggests that scholars approach this orientation towards the local with the idea of 'integrated tourism development', where local people engage in tourism-based rural development, mobilise a new kind of pride in local landscapes and local events, and create new jobs and opportunities locally. In this way, locals, second-homers, people from the surrounding area, and other tourists may sometimes engage in creating small tourism together, thus becoming part of and sharing a geo-social position. Geo-social positions, thus, do not exist *a priori*, but are formed through processes, building the specific characteristics of local engagement. Therefore, there is no natural 'one-to-one' relation that creates a geo-social position for every place, and there can also be competing and interacting geo-social positions referring to the 'same' place even within the same alliances or coalitions. Meanwhile, the composition of the local environment matters.

4. The relationship between locals and second-homers in rural studies

As shown in the analysis, it was a key point in our observations that locals and second-homers managed to build and maintain a coalition and work together based on a shared framework of local development. We briefly review a few contributions in the rural studies literature on the role of second-homers and their relation to locals.

Farstad and Rye (2013) found that previous research focused on differences between interests and attitudes of locals versus second-homers, but their research at sites in Norway documented more converging interests and relations. While second-homers have

sometimes been seen as defendants of the status quo and preserving the environment, many local residents also value the environmental qualities of their surroundings. On the other hand, while local residents have been seen as most interested in rural development that leads to new jobs and services, second-homers also express attention to rural development around their second home. Farstad and Rye (2013) thus also found evidence of 'cross-camp cooperation' (47) between the two groups.

Tuulentie and Kietäväinen (2019) investigated the kind of part-time rural community enacted by second-home owners in the Finnish Lapland. They found that 'the division between "real" locals and second-home owners is not straightforward' (12), and their research explained how second-homers meet the locals—for example, in local shops, market squares, hiking trails and tracks, and in the exchange of favours and news. The authors suggest that the local residents' association where fieldwork is conducted 'could effectively arrange interaction between residents and in doing so strengthen part-time residents' communality and attachment to the place' (14).

Part-time residents were investigated as 'trans-local community actors' in three Danish and one Swedish island(s) by Larsen et al. (2018), highlighting how non-residents engage in entrepreneurial rural development projects through investments and active participation. To understand the dynamics of rural development, the authors argued, it is necessary to overcome the dichotomies between residents and non-residents since the crucial point is how 'engagement hubs' emerge across permanent residents, second-home owners, and occasional tourists.

A contrast to these examples comes from Gallent (2015), who studied the potential of bridging social capital from second-homers in the tourist town of Stintino, Sardinia. Little engagement with local permanent residents was found, likely because this case involved 'large tourism'—the holiday town is dominated by tourists and the place feels like a business rather than a community (Gallent, 2015: 106). The town is overwhelmed with tourists and is coping with insufficient infrastructure; moreover, local elites have already become wealthy from tourism, and second-home owners only defend their private interests. This case is an interesting contrast to the one explored here because it indicates that different groups do not necessarily share a common good and there is not one, but maybe several, geo-social positions at work.

Finally, Huijbens (2012) studied second-homers in two Icelandic villages. He investigated whether or not second-homers as recurrent visitors can build networks and social capital as a result of their engagement in the place. The findings suggest a difference between 'homesick locals' having a second home in the place they grew up, and 'lifestyle locals' with no or few local ties. 'Homesick locals' use their second home as a rallying point with family and friends, but since they initially left the place, they have not been active there. In contrast, those with few ties treat the place as a lifestyle choice and are more inclined to act in demand of cultural activities and services, thus propelling local tourism.

This brief literature review suggests that there are potentially crucial converging interests and relations between locals and second-homers in rural development, where the possible contribution from second-homers needs attention in the development of small tourism.

5. The case study: participatory methods

Our investigation of the process of small-tourism development emerged from the Danish INNOCOAST project, 2016–2019. Lildstrand was selected because it represents a challenging, extreme case of a very small fishing village far from urban areas, with little fisheries activities remaining and many summer houses. Furthermore, the authors were invited by a small group of locals to assist with making more out of the existing small-scale tourism ambitions; the first visit and meeting took place in November 2016.

Our method was participatory observation (Spradley, 1980; Veal, 2011); data were gathered through organising and facilitating three

local development workshops in Lildstrand (held March 2017, November 2017, and February 2019). The workshops were documented through note-taking and a mix of sound and video recordings. The format and organisation of the workshops emerged from our dialogues with the local development group and their local association, *Hawboerne* (the local term for 'sea people'), which participated in the process developed to include other people, including second-homers. Invitations to the workshop were disseminated by the local group. Each seminar lasted 4 h and took place on Saturdays between 13.00 and 17.00 in the community house, '*Hawboernes hus*'. We offered a few short presentations on tourism development in other places, but our main role was to chair the development workshops, including the work of three groups. Our role was, thus, more to facilitate than to lead or lecture. In the first seminars, our participation helped invite other speakers from the area, such as from the regional museum, the national park, and so on; this integrated more actors, thus generating co-ownership in the process. Increasingly over the course of the seminars we also encouraged people engaged in the process to give the presentations, reporting on their projects, steps, and achievements. The most central data for this paper came from the final group work in the last seminar, where we directly asked participants to reflect on 'what has happened, what has been important, and what did we learn?'. The groups were mixed, and we chaired and produced a short summary of each group project, which we also shared with the locals. This session was thus organised as a direct-feedback session to inform our research.

In addition to the data from the seminars and especially from this last session, we examined documents produced by the participants, our observations in the town (and at events other than the seminars), and our direct communication via phone, e-mail, or Skype with some of the people involved (Fig. 1).

The longitudinal dimensions of this research result from engaging in the work for almost five years; thus, we have been able to observe changes in the community and its built environment over time. As it is explorative research, several themes and concepts were not anticipated. One mode of analysis has been to offer a full report of the content of the final feedback session and frame this based on the impressions reported in the previous workshops and additional data. Another mode has been to analyse the Masterplan Lildstrand (2018, 2019, 2020) developed by the local association to better understand participants' types of engagement with the environment when they are involved in the mobilisation process.

In theorising the empirical analysis, we argue that concepts from Thévenot's (2007) practice-based view of engagement may be 'blended in' (Oswick et al., 2011) to support the findings. These are applied as analytical tools to describe strategies of community development that have a bearing on resilience and the framing of a resilient geo-social position in Lildstrand. Thévenot distinguishes between varied forms of engagement on a continuum from familiar and very local, partly tacit, to more generalised and explicit forms of engagement. In particular, he differentiates between three types of engagement that, he argues, are governed by three types of goods: 1) familiar engagement (i.e. a personalised, 'homely' engagement with the environment governed by the good of convenience, such as inhabiting one's home, taking a walk, picking berries, talking to friends, or the like); 2) engagement in plans to get things done, governed by the good of utility, visibility, recognisability, and moving forward; and 3) engagement in justifiable actions governed by a justifiable collective or societal good. These forms of engagement imply that actors oscillate between personalised and generalised assessments of the environment. The personalised versus generalised distinction may also be described as a continuum—which is probably a more robust conceptualisation—however, for heuristic reasons we retained these three formats, enabling us to capture varied forms of engagement and their combination.

It should be noted that Thévenot (2014) describes other forms of engagement as well, such as engagement in exploration (the curious explorer). Engagement can more generally be defined as dynamic

☐ Three development workshops between researchers, the development group and permanent as well as non-permanent residents, and other interested actors from around Lildstrand about how to develop tourism activities in the area.

☐ Three fields visits to conduct the development workshops and make participant observations.

☐ Direct observations during six other field visits.

☐ Seven interviews with people that represent different groups in the local community.

☐ Ongoing contact with the development group via phone, Skype and email; this has continued until 2020.

☐ Various relevant reports, including the different versions of the Masterplan Lildstrand (2018, 2019, 2020) and the many power point presentations, produced by the development group.

☐ The development group in the community wrote a diary about all activities (Innovationsværksteder Lildstrand – borgerinitiativer siden efterår 2016, 2018).

☐ Longitudinal collection of documentary material from web sites and written documents; this data collection has continued until 2020.

Fig. 1. Methods and data.

processes that reflect actors' willingness to invest resources in interactions with connected others (Brodie et al., 2019). In our data, it appears that it is the couplings between these forms of engagement, mutually fitting within a geo-social space (which can be homely, planned, and justifiable), that generate the resilient practices and plans in Lildstrand through mobilising people in particular ways (from the personalised to the generalised). The paper contributes to the literature through this theoretical blending of data that helps specify conditions of resilient geo-social position-building, thereby extending previous accounts of the constitution of place as a geo-social position. Prior to the analysis, we briefly describe the locale studied.

6. The village of Lildstrand

Lildstrand is a small fishing village in Northwest Jutland with about 40 permanent inhabitants and over 100 summer houses. It is in the eastern part of the municipality of Thisted and is one of the most remote places in Denmark, situated next to the longest non-built coastline. The landscape is rough and open with wind and, occasionally, strong storms. The area has, like the whole North Sea coastline, long sand beaches and is a tourist area. Many foreign tourists, particularly from Germany, rent summer houses there. However, Northwest Jutland is not as commercialised as the northernmost and southern parts of the North Sea coast, which feature hotels, restaurants, and amusement parks. The natural environment is a main attraction for tourists, second-homers, and locals engaged in perusing the landscape, collecting stones, walking, biking, horse riding, and other activities. A particular attraction is the iconic 47-m-tall limestone cliff, Bulbjerg, that is 3 km east of Lildstrand and regarded as Denmark's only bird cliff. Both locals and tourists highlight Lildstrand and Bulbjerg as places for raw experiences in nature (Mariager, 2019).

Lildstrand was established in the mid-19th century as a fishing locale (Madsbøll, 2020). There is no harbour, so the vessels are drawn up on shore by a winch—an old tradition in western Jutland. Fishing was the main occupation until 2007 when a new fishing quota system was introduced. This led to the closure of the fisheries, which has been described as a loss of traditional, masculine values (Brandtoft et al., 2018). Today, only one fisherman using a small vessel is active in Lildstrand, but the winch is also used for hobby and heritage purposes. There is also a boat association ('*bådelaug*') composed of both local and non-local members. The population has declined and, today, the approximately 40 permanent inhabitants are pensioners and people who work outside the village. Some of the locals have settled recently and made their second home their 'first home'. There are no public facilities and only a few commercial ones (two small fish shops and a kiosk in the

summer). The inhabitants must drive 10 km to the nearest larger village to reach shops and municipal services, such as a library and school. Thus, activities are few and life is quiet in the village, particularly in the winter. There are beaches, moors, and forests.

The decline of Lildstrand is similar to that of other fishing villages, particularly in Northwest Jutland. However, many other villages have developed new activities and a new profile, such as becoming a centre for surfing, developing commercial tourism (with cafés, shops, and restaurants), or revitalising the fisheries within an experience-based economic framework. Lildstrand has (or had) not developed any new profile and is thus one of the most serene coastal villages. Furthermore, it was not included in National Park Thy, which opened as Denmark's first national park in 2010. The park is located on the western coast of Thisted (see Fig. 2) and includes extensive natural areas. Denmark's national parks (https://danmarksnationalparker.dk/english/) are characterised by a high degree of involvement by the locals, and in an international comparison, they have a relatively low degree of protection of nature and much room for outdoor and other leisure activities, tourism, and the like. National parks are thus regarded as tourist attractions.

Prior to these changes, there was less contact between locals and summer-house owners, but there has been a tradition of second-homers taking part in local events and associations (Madsbøll, 2020). Our analysis first investigates the establishment of a coalition between locals and second-homers, which we consider an example of resilience practices. The second analytical section investigates these practices through the lens of the Master Plans (2018–2020), reflecting successive engagements with the environment—from personalised to generalised—thereby extending the analysis to explain the constitutive elements of the geo-social position.

7. The resilience practices of the Lildstrand coalition

We begin the analysis by listing some of the many projects aimed at small tourism in Lildstrand with an emphasis on nature, and we take this as a point of departure to analyse the feedback that we obtained from the participants in the last workshop. The multiplicity of projects and the openness for new plans seems to be an important part of the mobilisation journey in 2016–2020. Meanwhile, this list also gives a clear impression of the small-scale material designs and initiatives that form small tourism in Lildstrand:

● Prior to 2016, several associations that formed to protect the winch, the landing site, and the fishing vessel Skarreklit (originally built in 1962 but renovated for leisure trips, fishing, and to preserve the

Fig. 2. Map of National Park Thy (from Agger tange to Hanstholm) also showing the proposed extension to Lildstrand (at the arrow) and Bulbjerg, Northwest Jutland (produced by TV Midtvest, publicly available from the national park website at https://nationalparkthy.dk/media/285834/nationalparkgruppen-ved-lild-strand.pdf, accessed 18.12.2020).

heritage of the occupation) managed to keep the local winch running. Coping with numerous storms—some of which dragged the winch out to sea—locals managed to raise funds to re-establish the winch. Moreover, the name 'Skarreklit' is emblematic because it is the name of a local cliff that stood in the sea outside Bulbjerg until it was destroyed in a storm in 1978. The cliff is represented in many images (including in the large mural in the local community house, see Fig. 3). These combined stories of the vessel, winch, and cliff are strong symbolic expressions of nature's power in the village.

- Building on this legacy, in 2016 there was already a plan to build a 'picnic house' ('*madpakkehus*') where people can eat indoors, even in bad weather, in an attractive location next to the winch, the vessels,

and the summer kiosk. Funded by several foundations, the picnic house opened in 2020.

- The first development workshop was held on 25 March 2017. The participants emphasised the natural environment around Lildstrand as the basis for local activities and tourism. A development group with locals and second-homers was established, and it was decided that the Hawboerne local association should be the organisational home of the development work.
- To continue the work of the first workshop and some Skype discussions, two summer-house owners took the lead in forming a proposal for extending the Thy National Park to Lildstrand and Bulbjerg,

Fig. 3. Reporting group work in plenum (second development workshop, 4 November 2017).

leading to numerous meetings with park authorities as well as media appearances (see below).

- The second development workshop was held on 4 November 2017, and the National Park director was among the invited speakers.
- Funds were raised to clean up one of the beach ponds (*'strandkær'*) that are characteristic parts of the coastal landscape, and discussions on cleaning up more ponds continued with the Nature Agency, the organisation responsible for the majority of nearby land that is protected and owned by the state.
- A group of summer-house owners produced a map to guide exercise in the environment around Lildstrand. Continued discussions were held with the Nature Agency on path development and other issues.
- The Hawboerne association grew, and second-home owners became active members.
- In spring 2018, the first edition of the 'Masterplan for Lildstrand 2018–2030' was produced and presented to the mayor of Thisted.
- During 2018, the development group engaged with a number of other local associations, including the 'Network of Coastal Towns' (*'Kystbyernes Netværk'*).
- The local mini-museum was renovated, and discussions with Thisted Museum continued.
- The Creativity House, a new initiative to take over a local empty house (former shop) and make this a place for artists to work, was introduced. Supporters applied to receive a major grant in 2020 to buy and restore the house.
- Ongoing discussions were held on how to finance improved coastal protection since flooding after storm surge led to the destruction of some houses near to the sea.
- Often, meetings with local and regional politicians were held, and appearances were made in local and regional media.
- The third and final development workshop was held 23 February 2019.
- In 2020, major funding was received from the RealDania Foundation (DKK 1 million) to construct 'coastal terraces' (*'kystterrasser'*) in 2021 (as part of the *'underværker'* programme).
- The development group engaged in political action in the eastern part of Thisted to lobby for an extension of National Park Thy to include the area in which Lildstrand is situated. Approximately 130 locals participated in a meeting with the National Park board. On 16 December 2020, the board decided to work for the extension, suggesting this to the municipality.
- Lastly, a new Dark Sky project is under development (https://hawboerne.dk/dark-sky-thy). (This list is based on Innovationsværksteder Lildstrand: Borgerinitiativer siden efterår 2016, A Diary of Activities of the Local Development Group for 2016–2018, 2018;

other documents; participatory observations; and follow-up interviews conducted in 2019 and 2020.)

Asking participants in the third development workshop about 'what has happened, what has been important, and what did we learn?', the response, summarised in excerpts from each group (Figs. 4–6), gives an impression of the crucial aspects of the mobilisation from the participants' perspective.

First, the development workshops, and especially the first workshop, were formative for the whole process because they made people with different backgrounds and interests meet around the same agenda. The short presentations by invited speakers and locals summing up the results achieved, together with open-ended (Design Thinking-like) group work with sticky notes (see Fig. 7), produced a common agenda that included many ideas and perspectives. Each of the three groups, with each chaired by one of this paper's authors, identified a rapporteur to present in plenum. This simple but effective procedure managed to shape a shared framework for the whole process.

Second, establishing a dynamic relationship between locals and second-homers is regarded as absolutely central, and this is something that is not only instrumental for the process but also valuable in itself because second-homers feel that they become part of the local community and are thus also invited into the local Hawboerne association. They are becoming real second-homers—not simply people who own a summer house and rent it out, but people whom permanent residents get to know.

Third, engagement by a group of so-called 'fiery souls' (*'ildsjæle'*) was highlighted by all participants and is a case of local community entrepreneurs (Aquino et al., 2018; Barth, 1972; Johannisson, 1987; Fletcher and Watson, 2006; Sheldon and Daniele, 2017). Their engagement and leadership have been crucial, but it would never have become sufficiently persistent if they had not gained the support and confidence of both locals and second-homers. Importantly, there are both locals and second-homers among the six fiery souls in the local development group.

Fourth, mobilisation attracts even more actors, including people from the area around Lildstrand (the Hannæs area) who visit often and take part in meetings and initiatives (e.g. the Creativity House), as well as members of the boat association who live far away. Fifth, people stress that they share the vision of 'the quiet compartment', unlike other nearby and more crowded tourist places. Aiming only at small tourism is central to the process.

Finally, the roles of the Master Plans (Masterplan Lildstrand, 2018, 2019, 2020) written by the development group are strongly highlighted. The plans: (1) contribute to the development of a shared vision, but (2) also produce recognition and legitimacy in relation to municipal authorities and a number of other actors, including the Nature Agency,

Group 1 summary

- 'The first workshop was an important event' – 'starting the process to formulate what we want'
- 'Important that there are some fiery souls'
- 'The relationship between summer house owners (second homers) and the permanent residents has been strong. Second homers come here regularly, they do not rent out summer houses. The permanent residents know second homers'
- 'The Master Plan works to unite and clarify how part-projects make up a common profile'
- '….a common objective which all agree on, keep "peace and quiet" Lildstrand as a ", quiet compartment", avoid "tivolisation". Agreement makes strong, avoiding tensions'
- 'The Master Plan is strong since thought in connection with the plans of the municipal authority's and other plans'
- 'Important to trace fiery souls outside of Lildstrand. Giving access to an existing circle of networks in the back land…'
- '…Lildstrand never gives up. This is a culture with roots in the sea taking and giving. Building up again when something has been lost to the sea'

Fig. 4. Extract from Group 1 (Referat af gruppearbejde Lildstrand, 2019).

Group 2 summary

'Lildstrand has managed to engage people with different relations to Lildstrand. Not only permanent residents and second homers. There are also participation and contributions from people from Frøstrup and the whole Hannæs area. And participation does not stop here. 2/3 of the members of Lildstrand Boat Association are from outside, including from other countries…. And a decisive thing is the respect between people. Listening and then analysing….. Lildstrand is a place one (from the back land) visits on excursion to take a walk on the beach, bathing or the like. A place to remember and to have memories about. Everybody agrees to value it as a quiet area – 'a quiet compartment', different from Klitmøller and Vorupør…. Speaking about engagement, co-ownership and co-creation, creating things step-by-step. You meet new people and get the feeling of taking part.'

Fig. 5. Extract from Group 2 (Referat af gruppearbejde Lildstrand, 2019).

Group 3 summary

'One resident stressed that the process has been a fantastic initiative to start the process and there have been fiery souls to form concrete projects and push them moving. There needs to be others to take over when the first fiery souls burn out…. The meetings have been decisive. They have been the frame to make things happen. They brought permanents residents and seconds homers (*sommerhusfolket*) together. There should be presentations about what happens in others places, 'lighthouses' succeeding…..Especially the second homers felt that there were included in the local community…. Many are more in their summerhouse (it has become a "second home") and wants to be a part of the local community.'

Fig. 6. Extract from Group 3 (Referat af gruppearbejde Lildstrand, 2019).

Fig. 7. A group in the process of clustering proposals (first development workshop, 25 March 2017).

National Park Thy, tourist organisations, and museums, among others. Furthermore, the Master Plan is a platform to cooperate with other nearby places and associations. The whole atmosphere of the process and how it was described by participants is one of co-creation, participation, engagement, and the theme 'Lildstrand never gives up', the last of which emphasises the town's persistence in overcoming storms and other extreme events in their immediate local environment. In addition, the process in itself created activity and interaction in the community, which was exactly what the inhabitants were looking for.

We see how a common vision is developed and includes very different actors in the coalition. While locals and second-homers play crucial roles, there are also participants from other places, which points to the non-territorial character of the coalition (see Dredge, 2019). It is crucial that all groups recognise each other's role as partners sharing a common vision, building what has been called 'bridging social capital', which we know is not working well in all—and especially in more developed—tourist destinations, as discussed above (Gallent, 2015). The format of the process—and especially the Master Plan, as we will see below—is able to include not only different kinds of actors but also different forms of engagement. In the end, it is, however, central that these forms of engagement come together in praising the quality of the local environment.

The building of the coalition and the process of establishing plans and actions for the development of small tourism in Lildstrand is an example of a resilience practice (Innerhofer et al., 2018; Saarinen and Gill, 2019) in an isolated and stagnant local community where actors come together to develop robust solutions. These practices have, in this case, a common purpose of nature-focused tourism as a means to create a better quality of life and well-being for year-round inhabitants and second-homers. The common purpose transpires in coalition-building and in the activities of community members. Local community entrepreneurs' interventions (Sheldon and Daniele, 2017; Aquino et al., 2018) have also been important in the formation of resilience practices. Finally, the researchers have functioned as a catalyst in the process, and this is an example among many others of how tourism knowledge is co-created and part of situated practices, bridging research and practice (Duxbury et al., 2019; Ren et al., 2017; Tribe and Liburd, 2016). In this case, practice was co-created prior to reporting research, which is on the other hand shared with community members. The practice developed a resilience strategy to create a better living situation, particularly for the permanent inhabitants. From the practice, we learned that conditions that can further resilient development—as was the case in the present study—are ensuring a shared framework in the community, the mobilisation of all parties, and the professional competencies (e.g. communicative, planning, or lobbying) of at least some community members (either permanent or temporary inhabitants).

8. The geo-social position: engaging with the local environment

The second part of the analysis looks more deeply into the construct of resilience practices and how a geo-social position is constituted, concentrating on the Master Plan for Lildstrand and its proposal to extend National Park Thy to include the coastal area of Northern Thy, all the way to Lildstrand and Bulbjerg. These plans are crucial expressions of common engagement with the local environment; moreover, the dynamic character of the Master Plan, revised across six versions so far, gives the impression that the progress made is a sign of success and optimism.

Analysing the text and how it communicates plans and projects reveals a central nexus between the evolving forms of mobilisation and ways of engaging with the environment. This observation led us to analyse the text as expressions of certain kinds of engagement, with inspiration from Thévenot (2007; see also Fuglsang and Nordli, 2018), thus working out in more detail what is, in this case, the geo-social position.

While all versions of the Master Plan offer detailed descriptions and plans for specific projects and activities, they also include a central section on 'The DNA of Lildstrand', expressing the overall vision and objectives in a cognitive style, praising the area's positive qualities. In the first version of the document, 'The DNA of Lildstrand' is:

> a well-functioning community in an isolated location in a protected natural environment. Good interaction between permanent residents and tourists. Year-round tourism. Local initiative and engagement. An enclave with space for reflection, attentive presence and community, and outdoor life. (Masterplan Lildstrand, 2018: 4).

This is a strong value statement that combines the advantages of the familiar community environment with the rewards of interactions between locals and tourists. The style of presenting keywords in a list is developed in the third version of the plan, with more emphasis placed on the plans in which people are engaged. The characteristics of Lildstrand are listed as such:

- Well-functioning urban community in an isolated location in a protected natural environment (dune heath, wood, sea).
- Coastal fisheries culture, history, authenticity.
- Harmonious community between permanent residents and second-home owners.
- Strong local engagement and initiative. Persistent co-creation.
- Tranquil enclave with space for outdoor life, community, attentive presence, reflection.
- Well-defined wishes for development: attracting permanent settlement and the development of silent tourism based on the conditions of the place. (Masterplan Lildstrand, 2019: 6).

Cultural heritage is now mentioned earlier and nature is exemplified, but first and foremost, the statement highlights the strength of the authentic community and tranquil enclave and engagement in co-creative development. In all versions, 'respect for place' is central, but now 'a resounding YES to an identity as part of National Park Thy' (Masterplan Lildstrand, 2019: 6) becomes ever more central. The villagers want to become 'the quiet section' of the National Park, to be included in the National Park with the special qualities of the place, the isolated coastline, and Bulbjerg through 'co-creation and reasonable use of place-bound potential' (Masterplan Lildstrand, 2019: 6).

The statements oscillate from familiarity and feelings of community to a development plan, which was already in progress in the first version. The kind of engagement is clearly more than Thévenot's (2007) first 'regime of the familiar' (416), where people mark out their immediate surroundings on which they rely. In the first version, the authors were already moving towards the second 'regime of engagement with a plan', but this is more clearly communicated in the third version, and we see the more political expression of Thévenot's third form of 'justifiable action engagement regime' seeking to present the valorisation of the place, 'valid for a third party and characterised by generality and legitimacy' (Thévenot, 2007: 217). Thévenot (2007) argues that it is central that the form of communication presents the case and the values of what is good in the environment with 'official quality' (218). This is exemplified by how the local development group was quick to invite local politicians who took part in development workshops and in getting support letters signed by the mayor of the municipality. The very use of the title Master Plan ('Masterplan' in Danish) is, in itself, an expression of this claim of being a legitimate part of the system. The aim of the Master Plan is to be acknowledged and taken seriously by authorities and many other partners, and Lildstrand has succeeded in this.

The communicative form of the sixth version of the Master Plan (Masterplan Lildstrand, 2020: 7) is even more general and fitted to other plans. In line with Thévenot's third 'justifiable action engagement regime', this Master Plan presents the author's case—to themselves, to authorities, and to the board of the National Park—in a professional way. The first word describes Lildstrand as an 'outdoor town', which is a

central concept communicated in Thisted's municipal strategic planning document. In this way, the Master Plan justifies its role as a legitimate document.

Thévenot (2007) explains the importance of identifying the positive outcomes that these actions seek to accomplish: 'The good that engagement aims to guarantee orients how reality is grasped and specifies the format of what constitutes relevant information' (409). This is a specific kind of engagement, where people communicate how they depend on their environment. Based on their personal experience—'their regime of the familiar'—the authors of the plan quickly moved into the 'engagement into plan'. In addition, the Master Plan managed to move even further into 'engagement into justifiable action'. The point of this analysis is that the different cognitive forms matter significantly for mobilisation and the elaboration of the geo-social position both among the locals and in relation to other actors outside the community. Thévenot (2007) explains that

Cognitive forms vary considerably as the human being detaches herself from what is closest and most personal and moves to communicate across increasing relational distances. I use the verb "communicate" here with its original meaning of taking part in a common matter (411).

Thus, to communicate is something more subtle and fundamental than an issue of media attention or the like. Communicating is about defining and arguing about a good (personal or common) and people engaging together with the environment.

The kind of engagement with the local environment analysed in the wording of 'The DNA of Lildstrand' above is an example of a specific type of cognitive form, arguing about what is *the good* prior to making decisions, beginning projects, and getting the attention of the authorities and foundations, goals on which all projects depend. The Master Plan succeeds in coordinating several mini-projects by making them all a contribution to achieve what has been communicated as a common good. 'It is from his dependence on an *engaged* environment that the *agent* derives his *capacity*, understood as the *power* to maintain that engagement' (Thévenot, 2007: 415, emphasis in original).

We suggest that this kind of engagement configured how the Lildstrand coalition was created as a 'geo-social position' since people could support the described type of engagement with the environment. However, in relation to the debate between Latour and Thévenot (see Blok, 2013), we also learned that the geo-social position is not as ontologically given—as suggested by Latour (2018), Latour et al. (2019), and Schultz (2020)—but needs to be configured through the ways that specific engagements define a good potentially linking up with wider sets of actors. What the common good is—and its 'green worth'—needs to be argued in practice with reference to the engaged actors who inhabit the space and make the world together. For example, the neighbouring coastal village of Thorup Strand, a few kilometres east of Lildstrand, pursued another argument about the common good, re-establishing coastal fisheries as a sustainable practice and experience for tourists. Other villages in the municipality of Thisted followed more aggressive tourist strategies, developing surfing and tourist attractions in ways that are very different from the small tourism—'the quiet compartment'—of Lildstrand. There is engagement with the environment in all these cases, but it is not the same.

The definition and communication of the common good varies. At this point it is, however, a real contribution from Latour to explain that this variation not only is a matter of the definitions and communications performed, but is also due to the inhabited space where people want to live. The heterogeneity of the Earth makes every site a materially specific complexity of layers; 'All that which cannot be seen from Sirius' (Latour, 2018: 131, authors' translation). This is the Earth's concrete material composition of layers, such as those making the, from time to time, troublesome coastline, the beach ponds, and the Bulbjerg cliff, which all need to be managed but not appropriated: 'The Earth is not appropriable. We belong to it, it belongs to nobody' (Latour, 2018: 131). Latour's statements remind us about the specificity of environments in any place, and this is part—but not all—of any geo-social position.

Thus, there is no doubt that the environment becomes a part of action because it is worth something, but it still matters a lot how the environment as a common good is approached and communicated. This depends on how geo-social positions, not a given from the outset, are performed, yet also on the concrete kinds of engagement practiced to defend and develop peoples' ways of life.

For the analysis of resilience practices in tourism—and more concretely for the engagement with small tourism—the resilience practices we saw developed by locals, second-homers, and others in the first analysis depend on people agreeing about the common good of the place. By describing the area and its environment with concrete projects, local engagement forms a geo-social position that is genuine to both people and place, and a powerful argument for persuading donors and decision-makers. The vision then becomes one of small tourism developing the common good of the specific, local environment.

9. Conclusion

This paper contributes to research on small tourism in rural places by theorising the practice in Lildstrand as a geo-social position under construction. The geo-social position implies embracing and extending one's local place to become a liveable community characterised by high engagement in the natural environment. The construct of engagement was applied to the analysis to indicate the complexity of these efforts. Geo-social engagement extends beyond merely inhabiting Lildstrand as a familiar and convenient community because it requires extensive engagement in utility plans that move ideas forward, as well as justifiable action.

The concept of resilience practice is important as it shows some of the work that goes into maintaining and mobilising engagement: developing coalitions, framing a common purpose or good that is relevant to the locals, and developing a master plan that transpires in community members' concrete practices as well as in their more extensive relations to other places. Through such practices it may be possible—though still difficult—to maintain the required high levels of community engagement.

The paper's contribution is both concrete and general. We have been driven by the engagement expressed in Lildstrand in which we were involved. This led us to understand the astonishing, yet still modest and fragile, resilience practices of the coalition of locals, second-homers, and other supporters. The resilient character of these practices is not only about the engagement in small tourism but also in how processes have been steered and governed with skill and intuition. It is only through these processes that the remarkable forms of engagement evolved and formed the significant geo-social position of Lildstrand, represented by the Hawboerne association and the development group.

Lildstrand is an example of an interesting trend towards mobilising the local place in tourism, with the involvement of local people and an integrated and peer-oriented approach to tourism (Førde, 2014; Richards and Russo, 2016). This kind of small-tourism mobilisation is different and partly in opposition to industry policies intended to develop larger DMOs and plans for larger areas (i.e. 'large tourism'). Indeed, the Lildstrand mobilisation for small tourism managed to produce a 'justifiable action engagement regime' (Thévenot, 2007), recognised as a partner by, among others, the municipality of Thisted and National Park Thy, but this does not make this engagement equivalent to dominant trends in tourism policies and business. Rather, it is the other way round: exactly because of trends towards 'large' and business-driven tourism, the local mobilisation of diverse actors around a marginal place with its specific environment can stand out as different, and therefore attractive, for locals, second-homers, tourists, and others. It is another kind of geo-social position that has emerged from the engagement.

Furthermore, the contribution of this paper is to show how it is possible to engage with a place in an era of connectivity to make use of and enact distance (Young, 2006) and relative isolation to define a geo-social position that is not homogenous, but inclusive of others. Working with a more-than-humans approach to resilience practices, this study has shown how environmental elements—such as a high-flood-risk coast, a constructed environment in need of maintenance, environments with the potential for better recreation options, and not least the harsh beauty of the landscape itself—make people unite in a common cause because they relate to and live with the same elements—although in very different practices and roles, from locals to second-homers to others from the area. This engagement is about using small tourism to support liveability—the good life.

We recognise that there are limitations to the types of engagement applied to the analysis in this paper. The three types described mainly underline the oscillations between personalised/local and generalised/ publicly argued forms of engagement. They describe how actors, in order to develop the geo-social position, must relate to local engagement formats, yet also link up with a wider set of actors to create a resilient position. In this way, actors must manage a paradox between personalised and generalised formats of engagement. How to handle this paradox may be further studied in future research, while also seeking nuance in the formats of engagement since other types of engagement in geo-social positioning may clearly exist. Further, the engagement of actors can certainly be constrained by, for example, the dynamics of local politics, peoples' access to resources (such as researchers), or struggles among actors. How engagement can be constrained and manipulated may be a topic of future research.

We have demonstrated the utility of the concept of small tourism in analysing community and tourism development in peripheral rural regions. We have explained the kind of energetic and proactive resilience practices needed to mobilise engagements, forming a coalition around a common geo-social position. And we have learned how engagement with small tourism implies a revival of local communities where the vital activities of people's participation become *as important* as tourism as a business. Small tourism is about engaging with the value and common good of the local environment, which is central in rural development.

Credit author statement

Acknowledgements

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