



Second home tourism impact and governance: Evidence from the Caspian Sea region of Iran



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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the effects of the second home phenomenon in the Caspian Sea region of Iran. The unique spatial characteristics of this region have made it a magnet for domestic and international tourists. The region has been experiencing high growth of second home tourism development and exacerbated population growth, especially in the last three decades. However, absence of a proactive strategic planning and clear development policy in the context of a deliberate governance has resulted in numerous environmental problems in this unique and pristine region. This study aimed to explore the governance of processes of development and potential impacts of this mode of tourism in the Caspian Sea region. With the present mode of development, it is assumed irreversible loss of flora and fauna of this region is highly probable. The scale of such a mode of tourism and its impact was investigated through a qualitative research method based on in-depth interviews (focused interview), in the context of *phronesis planning research*. The findings revealed that second home tourism growth has been based on a *laissez-faire* development approach, where clear policy and planning are in deficit. Furthermore, study revealed that second home tourism is dominated by vested interests of Real Estate firms from outside of the region (i.e., an exogenous force with market oriented agenda); who are also receiving favors from local government officials. Alas, 'publics', as a legitimate stakeholder, has no input and influence in the process of second home development. The term '*publics*' refers to the identifiable stakeholders whose role in the environmental governance of the region has been bypassed. The study has also concluded that the present trajectory of second home development undermines the region's environmental quality, social and cultural identity, and sustainable economic prosperity.

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1. Introduction

Rural tourism in general and second home tourism in particular is rapidly growing forms of tourism around the world: "Being an integral part of rural areas and their history, second homes are an established example of the post-productive consumption of countryside" (Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen, 2010: 194). Rye (2011: 263) asserts that "whereas the countryside traditionally relied on exports of commodities by the primary industries (agriculture, fisheries, and extractive industries) to urban markets, it has become increasingly characterized by its role as producers of rural services,

experiences and quality of life".

Meanwhile, the expansion of urbanism and stresses of urban life, not to mention the search for a pleasant climate and clean air, have contributed to the expansion of the second-home phenomenon around the world (Olga et al., 2015; Opačić, 2009; Paris, 2011; Roca, 2013; Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen, 2010). At the same time, the second-home phenomenon has perceived as a positive socio-economic project in rural areas (Farstad and Rye, 2013). Moreover, the reliance of rural areas on primary resources has weakened due to globalization and economic restructuring that mainly manifests in transformation from an extractive economy to services. In the context of changing ruralities, Rye (2011:263) stated,

Whereas the countryside traditionally relied on exports of commodities by the primary industries (agriculture, fisheries, and extractive industries) to urban markets, it has become increasingly characterized by its role as producer of rural

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services, experiences, and quality of life. It is no longer only a site of production but as much a product in its own right; advertised, transacted and consumed within the framework of market institutions.

The concept of a “second home” exposes a plethora of notions that makes it difficult to tie down the concept. Nevertheless, numerous connotations are associated with the phenomenon of second home tourism, including “rest and peace,” “slow down and relax,” “getting away from the grind,” “spiritual home,” “cottage garden,” “romantic,” and “simple life close to nature.” Second homes also have spatial connotations, as they are labeled ‘seasonal suburbanization’ and ‘complementary spaces’ where urbanites are occupying spaces that otherwise would remain undeveloped and natural (Jeong et al., 2014).

For the purpose of research, it is defined as a dwelling used for temporal visits by the owner or someone else, and it is not the user's permanent place of residence (Marjavaara, 2008). Nevertheless, second homes are nowadays an integral part of contemporary leisure activities (Hall and Müller, 2004; McIntyre et al., 2006).

Iran has not remained immune to the expansion of second-home tourism (Anabestani, 2014), especially in the Caspian Sea region, where the landscape, climate, and proximity to the capital city have reinforced this phenomenon. In fact, the region has become a “pressured area”—rural regions within the sphere of influence of major urban areas (Burton, 1995). This temporary migratory process to the Caspian Sea region, which culminated in mushrooming second-home tourism, is attributed to natural amenities and the accessibility provided by transportation infrastructure (Chi and Marcouiller, 2012; Mirani and Farahani, 2015).

The study aims to explore the possible conflict between the processes of second home development and governance on the one hand and the region that is subjected to this form of tourism on the other. The Caspian Sea region is considered in its totality through a holistic view of people and the environment, taking into account the fact that a holistic view is essential to understand and promote conservation of coastal regions.

1.1. Aim and direction of the study

The first aim is to fill the deficit of attention paid to the second home phenomenon in terms of information, understanding, and strategic planning to monitor the processes of this type of tourism and its impact. Frost (2003) asserts that:

... Second homes are seen as sitting outside the conventional tourism industry. They are not commercial operations, their owners are not tourism businesses, they do not engage with tourism associations or destination marketing authorities and they seemingly do not generate employment or other direct economic effects. As such, it is easy to overlook them and their impact (p. 3).

The second aim of the study is to go beyond the traditional income-based approach to second home tourism and focus on social, environmental, and other ramifications of this activity.

The third aim of the study is to establish a discourse on second home tourism for the purpose of taking it out of isolation and placing it in the mainstream tourism epistemology (i.e., within the non-business related tourism field (TF2) (Tribe, 2010), and towards a sustainable agenda. This is justified, as the impact can also be contextualized as counter-urbanization, where urbanites find refuge in amenity-rich areas (i.e., Caspian Sea region). Chi and

Marcouiller (2012) described this as

... The diffusion of more affluent “urban refugees” to remote high-quality environments catering to the development of recreational housing as second, third, or fourth homes. Indeed, counter-urbanization represents the driving factor behind enclaves of the rural rich with their spatial presence, leisure activities, and resulting community impacts (p. 48).

In the meantime, presented model (see Fig. 1.), is an illustration of second home phenomenon in the context of current stage of tourism development. Therefore, second home tourism is considered a formidable economic activity based on interaction between land use and environmental impact where a unique environment of Caspian Sea is at stake. The model is an epitome of ‘the complexity and intensity of the interactions, both natural and man-made lead to a degradation of the land quality, biodiversity reduction, food security concerns and lack of environmental sustainability at different scales’ (Perminova et al., 2016). The assumption is that the present pattern of second home development in the Caspian Sea region of Iran contradicts the principles of bio-capacity of the region and the ability of nature to regenerate the resources to fulfill the needs of the growing population with respect to the social, economic and environmental dimensions.

2. Theoretical framework

There is ample research regarding socioeconomic as well as environmental impacts of tourism in general, which mainly address this issue from residents' point of view (Almeida-García et al., 2016; Boley et al., 2014; Mason and Cheyne, 2000; Olya and Gavilyan, 2016; Vargas-Sánchez et al., 2011; Wang and Xu, 2015). However, research on second home tourism is rather scant and mainly focused on European cases. Studies on second home tourism in developing countries are rare and, in the case of Iran, almost nonexistent, notwithstanding its emerging second home phenomena.

However, the negative impacts of second home tourism cannot be overlooked, as it generates immense sociocultural and environmental costs (Gallent, 2014; Hall and Müller, 2004; Jeong et al., 2014). While second home tourism is ‘inherently dependent upon the sustainability of the natural environments in which they occur’ (as cited in Long and Hoogendoorn, 2013, p.91); most of the studies on second home tourism have not addressed the negative environmental impacts in a regional context (Huhtala, and Lankia, 2012; Jeong et al., 2014; Orueta, 2012).

One of the early publications on second home is a seminal volume (*Second Homes: Curse or Blessing*, edited by Coppock, 1977), which mainly focused on European cases not necessarily addressed the issue in the context of developing countries. However, technological innovations in transportation have contributed to a spatial spread into the most pristine and vulnerable geographies, and into the social fabric of remote areas. Second home tourism has also been examined by various disciplines and is highly susceptible to multidisciplinary research.

Second homes flourished in the English language literature of the 1970s and 1980s, when academicians turned their attention toward the second home phenomenon, but the main resurgence of interest and enthusiasm started in the 1990s (Gallent and Tewdwr-Jones, 2000). By its nature, second homes have leisure functions (Gallent, 2014). Such an association reveals the nature and impact of second home tourism in the communities where they are planned. The issue of sociocultural conflicts is crystalized in the characteristics of residential tourists (second homeowners), whom Rodriguez identified as follows:

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