



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 socioeconomic 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:

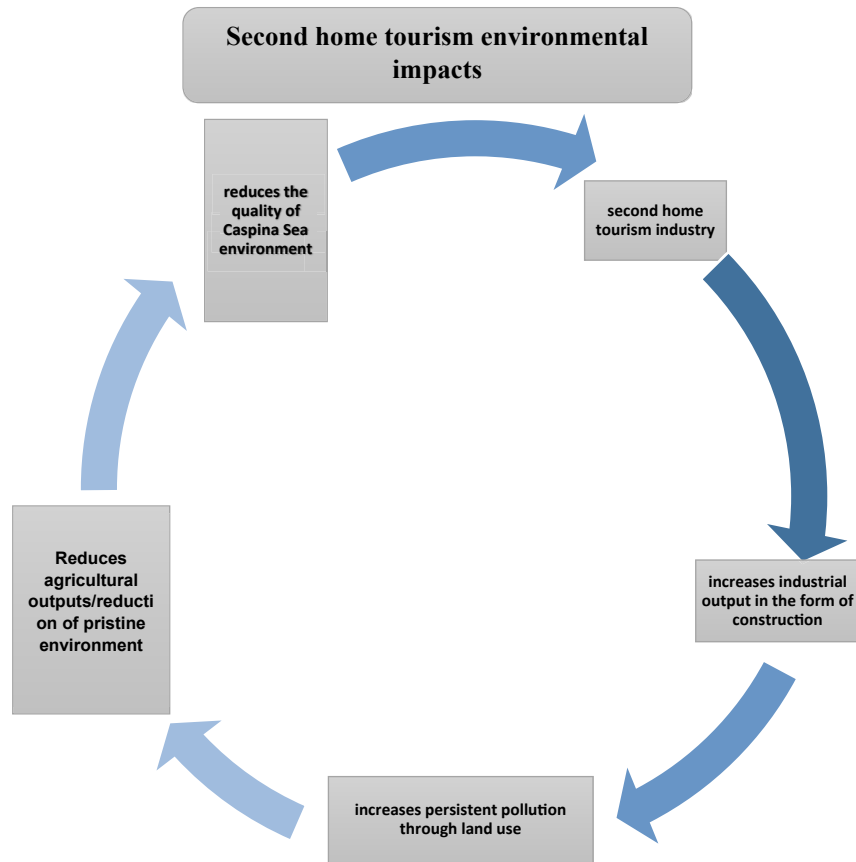


Fig. 1. Second home tourism environmental impacts process.

... a concrete human group (retirees, the elderly); they exhibit different patterns of mobile behavior (permanent migration, temporary migration or simply mobility); they demonstrate a tourist motivation with an individual basis (satisfaction in enjoying free time) and economic dimensions (in terms of consumption, real estate markets and services); and they create territorial effects (as cited in [McWatters, 2009](#): p. 4).

Therefore, second homes are more frequently viewed as a curse than a blessing ([Gallent, 2014](#)). Hall put it in general terms that “the sharpest contrast (and the basis of location conflicts) in tourism development projects is between residents who essentially use places to satisfy their needs and place entrepreneurs who strive to maximize exchange values through intensifying the use of the properties” (as cited in [Overvåg, 2010](#): p. 5).

To establish the direction of this study, the second home phenomenon is considered as ‘properties occupying consumption spaces, and with a focus exclusively on the simpler phenomenon of owning a second home for leisure purposes and, in particular, seeking a retreat from urban living’ ([Gallent et al., 2005](#): p. 18). This form of tourism, as ascertained by [Overvåg \(2010\)](#): p. 3), results ‘in commodification of rural areas through re-structuring of land from marginal agriculture into second home developments’. Such re-structuring can play an economic driving force in terms of housing and infrastructural development; however, it also has a political influence on rural communities in terms of reconfiguration of local power that will have socio-cultural ramifications. [Gill et al. \(2010\)](#): p. 142), in their study of second home and its impact on transformation of place argued that:

Second-home migrants are conceptualized as agents of place transformation. Their presence can generate far-reaching transformational effects that may be physical, environmental, social, economic or political. These changes may be perceived as either positive or negative depending on the meanings and values individuals attribute to place. Transformations are effected through a variety of interaction mechanisms that, depending on the politics of place, may include contestation, conflict and / or negotiation

The assumption is that most second-home projects are growing spontaneously without any clear policy and adequate planning mechanisms. Furthermore, they are not necessarily welcomed, as they increase the pressure on existing housing stock and force prices to go up, exacerbating seasonal patterns of employment and economic demand ([Long and Hoogendoorn, 2013](#)). In some cases, second home households are perceived as invaders ([Fialová and Vágner, 2014](#); [Hall and Müller, 2004](#)). Therefore, ecological and sociocultural conflicts can result in disappointments between the rural residents and visitors as second homeowners ([Dadvar-Khani, 2012](#)).

The underpinning theoretical framework for this study is based on *phenomenology* ([Groenewald, 2004](#); [Husserl, 1964](#); [Wong and Musa, 2015](#)), and *phronetic research* ([Basu, 2009](#); [Flyvbjerg, 2004](#); [van Reedt Dortland et al., 2014](#)). The two aforementioned frameworks are also called “case methodologies,” where context-dependent knowledge and experience are at the heart of the research. This method of study allows researchers to achieve a concrete experience ‘... via continued proximity to the studied

reality and via feedback from those under study' (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 223).

By applying *phronetic planning research* and *phenomenology* to the current practices of second home development case study, authors have made calculations of probability based on insider's knowledge and by extending practical research through employment of a set of heuristic questions that are tethered to the contextual setting (Thomas, 2011). Bearing in mind that this has been "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (as cited in Thomas, 2011: 21). One more fundamental element of *phronesis* research is the issue of power that is highly visible in this case where real estate firms and their partners (i.e., local government officials) have dominated this form of "hyper-regionalism" tourism. The element of power is also visible beyond the regional landscape, as "tourism capital is situated at the nexus of diverse and overlapping industries (construction, finance, property, transport, hospitality, media and communications) which manifests some of the fastest growing areas of investment and growth throughout the world" (Bianchi, 2009: 494–95).

In this study, authors focused on values, placed power at the core of analysis, got close to reality, emphasized the "little things," looked at practice before discourse, studied the case and context, moved beyond agency and structure, and did dialog with a polyphony of voices (Flyvbjerg, 2004). Furthermore, *phronesis* and *phenomenology* contributed to the analysis by allowing us to ask the following value-rational questions that also demonstrate the implications of power for this type of research (i.e. *phronesis*).

1. Where are we going with second home tourism development?
2. Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?
3. Is this type of development desirable?
4. What, if anything should we do about it? (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Flyvbjerg et al., 2012; Grybovych et al., 2011).

It is by answering the above questions in the context of *phronesis* (idea context) that the validity of knowing the reality of this case study was established based on "... practical reasoning, craft knowledge, or tacit knowing: the ability to see the right thing to do in the circumstances" (Thomas, 2011: 23). Thus, Flyvbjerg (2004: 284–85) believes: "*Phronesis* concerns values and goes beyond analytical, scientific knowledge (*episteme*) and technical knowledge or know how (*techne*) and it involves what Vickers calls "the art of judgement". In this context, decisions are made in the manner of a virtuoso social actors (e.g., 'publics' as stakeholders other than Real Estate firms and local government officials). "It will be argued here that *phronesis* is commonly involved in practices of planning and, therefore, that any attempts to reduce planning research to *episteme* or *techne* or to comprehend planning practices in those terms are misguided" (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 284–85). Therefore, this study attempted to investigate the case of second home development and its impact on unique coastal regions by transcending *techne* and *episteme*. This is accomplished by focusing on *phronesis*, which is also referred to as '*practical wisdom*' – a crucial decision-making skill within the context of second home development research in the community with multiple stakeholders. Through the lenses of *phronesis*, *community* is in reference to "a multicultural, disadvantaged, and often poor group of people living together in a specific area" (Greiff and Rennie, 2016: 170) who mostly have limited access to regional planning and development decision-making process.

Phenomenological approach not only legitimizes our standing on *phronesis* framework as a research platform in understanding and exploring '*praxis*' (i.e., practical knowledge) (Flyvbjerg, 2006), it also implies that: "A doctrine within a philosophy that provides

methodological guidelines in applied research. Most phenomenologists agree that its aim is to deepen and magnify the understanding of phenomena through the research participant's own perspectives in a living experience context (as cited in Wong and Musa, 2015: 84).

In a way, phenomenological research method, which is utilized to achieve qualitative evidence of the case study subject, does not contradict the 'practical wisdom' – Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* (Greiff and Rennie, 2016). In fact, "the main emphasis of phenomenological research is to describe or to interpret human experience as lived by the experienter in a way that can be used as a source of qualitative evidence. The preliminary concern for the researcher is to use qualitative data collection techniques to obtain examples of everyday experiences" (Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie, 2015: 92–93).

3. Study area

The Caspian Sea lies east of the Caucasus Mountains and dominates the flat expanses of western Central Asia. Approximately 20 percent of the southern shoreline borders of Iran (i.e., the Gilan, Mazandaran, and Golestan provinces) lie at the foot of the Elburz Mountains. The remainder of the shoreline is bordered by Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, with the central Asian steppes to the north and east (Fig. 2). The Caspian Sea is the world's largest inland body of water, with a surface area of 371,000 Km² and a maximum depth of about 980 m, and it has characteristics common to both seas and lakes. It is often listed as the world's largest lake (http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Caspian_Sea).

In the Caspian region of Iran, it offers sandy beaches, lush vegetation, and spectacular natural scenery provide a refreshing contrast to city life and the dry interiors; the three provinces of Gilan, Mazandaran, and Golestan are studded with resort complexes, leisure facilities, and holiday homes (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/caspian-sea-i>). An explosion of second holiday homes in recent years exacerbated further pressure on existing environmental problems (Rezvani and Safaei, 2005). 'According to estimates of the State Oceanographic Institute of Rosgidromet, it is an imperative to reduce the flow of petroleum products into the Caspian Sea by 51% in comparison to the 1980 level to restore Caspian water to a standard of clean water' (Ascher and Mirovitskaia, 2000: p. 73). The problem becomes more severe in the Caspian region of Iran due to the cyclonic nature of near-shore currents that aid in the spreading and transformation of pollutants.

Iran suffers the most from degradation of the Caspian environment since there are more people living along the Caspian coastline in Iran than other littoral countries. As a result, there is heavier concentration of pollution in this area and it has greater exposure to environmental problems" (as cited in Ascher and Mirovitskaia, 2000: p. 73). For the purpose of this study, three sites were selected (i.e., Noshahr, Mahmudabad, and Nur). The sites are located and administered as a part of the Mazandaran province in the Caspian Sea region of Iran (Fig. 3). These sites are popular destinations for second home tourism due to their pristine environment and accessibility. They encompass urban entities, coastal zones, and rural settings.

This form of tourism experienced rapid growth during the post-Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. It has become a trend, especially, among the newly developed middle class who desire to retreat to the tranquility of the Caspian Sea region and away from the unplanned urbanization explosion (Fanni, 2006; Tilaki et al., 2013).

With a rapidly growing urban population (Kazemipour and Mirzaie, 2005; The World Bank Group, 2015), the terrain has



Fig. 2. Map of Iran and position of Caspian Sea.

<http://payvand.com/news/10/nov/1032.html>; <http://payvand.com/news/10/nov/1032.html>

become conducive for the invigoration of real estate firms to take advantage of such unregulated markets. Therefore, numerous accommodation complexes (multi-apartment recreational buildings) and individual second homes have mushroomed along the coastal areas (Caspian littoral) (*hot spots*), as well as in various scattered villages.

The assumption is that the absence of a governance mechanism based on collective actions to guide and control second home development processes is threatening the sustainability of the Caspian Sea region with respect to its unique ecosystems. Furthermore, it is plausible to argue that the phenomenon of the second home is also a catalyst for the transformation of a production area into a consumption area (Opačić, 2009). However, conflict abounds in places where the economic dimension is the only concern. 'Thus, the growth of the second home sector gives rise to a number of new challenges, conflicts and contestations in rural communities' (Rye, 2011: p. 263).

4. Methodology

The study has attempted to identify the consequential environmental impact and possible threat to ecological uniqueness of the Caspian Sea region of Iran. A face-to-face in-depth interview conducted with nineteen respondents in the region during September and October 2015. Each interview session lasted for one to one-and-a-half hours. The depths of the examined issues further

improved and validated by triangulating the data through conventional content analysis (Humble, 2009). We assured participants that the audio-taped conversations will remain confidential and are used only for research purposes (Berg, 2001). Humble (2009: p. 37), emphasized that 'in conventional content analysis, categories emerge out of the analysis rather than through preconceived categories being imposed on the data'. A meticulously detailed field notes on informal conversations were adhered to for a deep understanding of the researched phenomenon. Fifteen semi-structured interview questions were administered to the respondents. The issues relevant to the research purpose guided the design of the interview questions. For the embedded issues/themes in the questions, refer to Table 1.

Purposive sampling was employed as a convenient method and suitable for this case study. Bryman (2012: p. 415) elaborated that:

'The goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed. Very often, the researcher will want to sample in order to ensure that there is a good deal of variety in the resulting sample, so that sample members differ from each other in terms of key characteristics relevant to the research question'.

Therefore, sample was composed of respondents from different institutions and organizations who had knowledge of second home

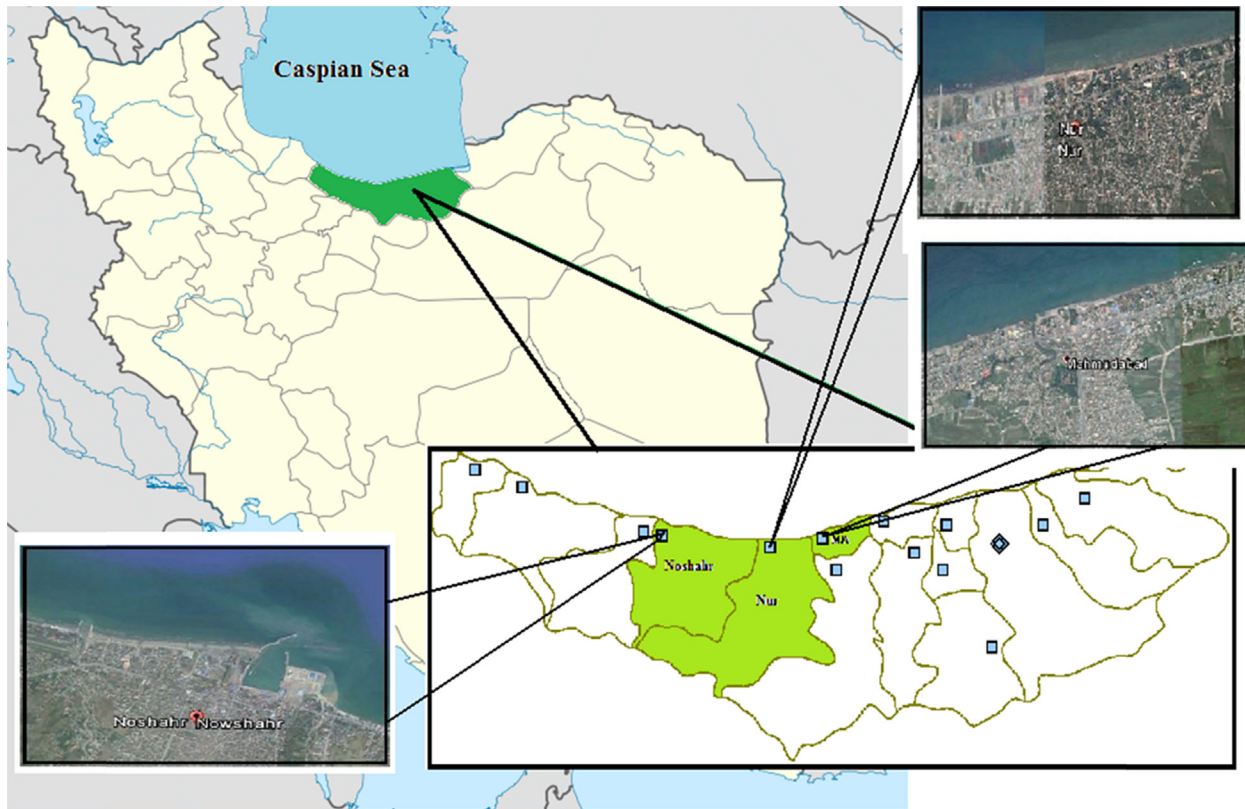


Fig. 3. Caspian Sea region of Iran and study areas.

development and construction, and were in both public and private sectors. Respondents are either indigenous to the region or long term residents. It was also made sure that the members of sample were different from each other in terms of key characteristics with respect to the research questions and the goals authors had in mind. Organizations that were targeted for data collection purpose were selected based on their relevancy to the research questions. Altogether, 19 respondents were interviewed, of which 10 were officials working with the municipalities and the public organization known as “Sazemane abadani va maskan” (The Organization of

Housing Development). Five of the respondents were professionals with degrees in civil engineering and architecture who had knowledge and information regarding the processes of second home development in the Caspian Sea region of Iran. The other four respondents were involved with different real estate and construction companies active in building complexes for the purpose of second homes in the region. For the respondent's profile, see [Table 2](#).

After making an appointment with the respondent, permission to digitally record and transcribe the interviews was solicited. Interviews were conducted in Persian and translated to English later, and both Persian and English texts were compared for clarification of possible misinterpretations. The process of recording and transcribing has many advantages, including ‘countering accusations that an analysis might have been influenced by researcher's values and biases.

For the purpose of data analysis, the recorded materials were listened to more than once, and transcribed materials were read more than once. This provided an analysis of the contents and exploration of the patterns in the answers. Then the coding process within each theme was conducted. This was followed by the identification of a theme (summing up a piece of text). Finally, each theme was supported by “quotes” or “extracts” that became the foundation for supporting interpretation. Additionally, qualitative content analysis in the form of ‘discourse analysis’/‘thematic analysis’ of documents (i.e., newspapers and web pages) was employed ([Bryman, 2012; Gee, 2014](#)).

4.1. Data collection

Given the exploratory nature of this study, we utilized [McCracken \(1988\)](#) guideline, which is immensely useful for long interviews. The aim was to gain knowledge of how second home

Table 1
Embedded themes in the interview questions for the purpose of data collection.

No.	Theme
1	Legal planning and land use.
2	Environmental impact assessment.
3	Carrying capacity analysis.
4	Environmentally sensitive land development.
5	Compatibility of the development.
6	Methods of site selection.
7	Infrastructural efficiency.
8	Coastal pollution.
9	Community benefit.
10	Public awareness and participation.
11	Waste management.
12	Stakeholder's involvement/citizen participation.
13	Utilization of planning instruments/technologies (e.g., GIS) for the purpose of spatial modeling.
14	Analytical hierarchy process for siting determination.
15	Multi-attribute decision-making practice.
16	Regional planning process.
17	Second home building design guideline.
18	Nature of policy and plan making process.
19	Spatial strategic planning.
20	Sustainability issues.

Table 2
The profile of respondents.

Respondent's code	Respondent's affiliation	Location/site	Respondent's gender
R#1.	Municipality	Nur	M
R#2.	Municipality	Nur	M
R#3.	Municipality	Mahmudabad	M
R#4.	Municipality	Noshahr	F
R#5.	Municipality	Noshahr	M
R#6.	The Organization of Housing Development	Nur	M
R#7.	The Organization of Housing Development	Mahmudabad	M
R#8.	The Organization of Housing Development	Mahmudabad	F
R#9.	The Organization of Housing Development	Noshahr	F
R#10.	The Organization of Housing Development	Noshahr	M
R#11.	Civil Engineer/private sector	Nur	M
R#12.	Civil Engineer/private sector	Nur	M
R#13.	Civil Engineer/private sector	Mahmudabad	M
R#14.	Architect/free- lance	Nur	F
R#15.	Architect/private sector	Noshahr	M
R#16.	Real Estate agent	Mahmudabad	M
R#17.	Real Estate agent	Nur	M
R#18.	Real Estate agent	Nur	M
R#19.	Real Estate agent	Nur	M

Note: M is male and F is female.

tourism phenomenon is governed with respect to statutory planning principles and sustainable development in an environmentally unique setting as the Caspian Sea region of Iran. Knowing the fact that statutory planning – even in a simplified zoning form – is a necessity to manage the spatial distribution and locations of development. By raising the issue of 'sustainability' concept in the research process; we transcended the fixation on physical planning issues, and aimed to explore the approach of the officials in terms of how they overcome the challenges facing the region and its development. The challenges manifested in making the second home development process 'more functional to polity of life and to spatial governance for developing local citizenship through proper spatial choices' (Albrechts, 2015: p. 104). A number of interview questions were designed to gauge stakeholders' participation, community involvement, and overall people's voice in the study area. See Appendix for the interview responses.

4.2. Data collection (content analysis)

The thematic analysis of media reports on second home tourism complexes in the Caspian Sea region that are published in officially approved and recognized URL web pages and national newspapers are summarized hereafter:

Shahbazak (2015) reported,

The province of Gilan in the Caspian Sea Region is at the mercy of real estate and construction firms. Every year over 100,000.00 forest trees are decimated for the purpose of second home construction. Numerous mountain slopes are cleared of vegetation for this purpose.

In an interview with the director (his name was filed but not revealed) of the environmental office of the province of Gilan, the director stated,

Encroachment upon landscape and vegetation is one of the challenges we are facing. The forest ecosystem and agricultural land has been transformed into second holiday home is considered one of the major threat to the environment. The environmental impact is exacerbated by lack of knowledge about the use of fertilizers by the farmers, reduction of biodiversity, and lack of adequate infrastructure including absence of sewerage (Shahbazak, 2015).

The director added that,

Environmental, social and cultural impact of second home development in Caspian Sea region has been exacerbated by in migration from the south and central part of Iran.

Dr. Rohani, the President of Iran, in response to outcry regarding the destruction of vegetation in the Caspian Sea region, recently declared that

We are planning to apply a moratorium on timber production in order to allow the forest habitat to recover. In the meantime, the producers of paper should switch to import rather than depend on domestic source (Shahbazak, 2015).

The lack of a formidable strategy on second home development has resulted in land use chaos, which has affected various upland ecosystems. One factor behind such haphazard second home development is the lack of institutional capacity and intergovernmental efficiency. For instance, the Organization of Forestry and Estuaries is in charge of monitoring the land use but is unable to prevent the unplanned expansion of second home development. The environmental agency involved in monitoring is unable to intervene, as the agency is not authorized to perform this task.

Shahbazak (2015) reported that,

Lack of land use planning and institutional incapacity, resulted in intensive second home development, which has brought commercialization and consumerism to rural areas. In terms of cultural invasiveness of second home development, some of the authentic values in the villages have been affected and declined.

Shahbazak (2015) claims that another threat to second home development is as follows:

Conversion of rice patties to second home villas and complexes is threatening a unique bread of rice genome. This not only will result in demise of valuable breed; it also intensifies the regions dependency on export.

Eghtesadonline, in a column entitled "Chaos of second home development in Caspian Sea region of Iran" stated,

The tsunamis of second home development in Caspian Sea region of Iran have targeted two provinces of the region- Gilan and Mazandaran. This has resulted in change of social, cultural and economic authenticity of these regions with consequences for vernacular uniqueness of these areas. Conversion of agricultural land to second home development is highly attractive as farmers have become euphoric by having access to cash through selling the farmlands to real estate firms for the purpose of second home development. The short termism behavior of farmers will have consequences for the future sustainability of the region due to diminishing the main economic base, which are rice patties (<http://www.eghtesadonline.com/fa/content/25323/>).

Examples of media headlines regarding second home development are as follows:

Media headline (June 23, 2015), the new accusation against one of the ministers of former president Mr. Ahmadinezhad. The subject of accusation is "land grab" by Real Estate firms in Caspian Sea region (<http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/429290/society/environment>).

Media headline (March 7, 2014):

Declaration by the supreme leader of Islamic Republic of Iran: "Whoever is accused of land grab must be prosecuted by the legal authorities. The solution to air pollution requires a serious consideration" ([w.kh.ir/detail/403525abaronline](http://www.kh.ir/detail/403525abaronline)).

Media headline (March 13, 2014):

Discovered cases of land grab by Real Estate firms since 2011; encompassing mountain slopes/sites, rural areas and coastal zones (<http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/403794>).

Media headline (May 3, 2015):

Land grab and mountain grab by Real Estate firms in Gilan province in Caspian Sea; second home development as hazardous practice to the forests. Over 100,000. Hectares of forest destroyed by second home development (www.khabaronline.com).

Media headline (April 22, 2015):

Minister of agricultural crusade warned that an upward/ascending occupation of land and illegal construction of second home, especially in the Caspian Sea region is a challenge for the authorities. He reiterated that farmers are selling their lands for a quick and cash for a short term gain, where middle men /tradespeople are reaping the main profit. He also stated that we do not offer the farmers an alternative to prevent them from selling their farmlands (<http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/493666/>).

Media headline (April 22, 2015):

The director of organization of arable land stated that "according to the policy which was amended by the nerve center of struggle against economic misdeed in March 11, 2015; it was agreed that a group of directors composed of various ministries and public agencies to initiate a campaign against land grab" (<http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/493666/>).

Meanwhile, discussions among different opposing views regarding second home development have been heating up in the

media. Some argue that second home developers facilitate the flow of capital to these regions that contribute to economic growth. However, no one is taking any notice of externalities and environmental cost (Holden, 2016). Furthermore, 'this growth has often come at the price of economic dependency, heightened class and regional inequalities, environmental degradation, particularly in coastal and marine areas, and radical changes to regional cultural practices and social relations (as cited in Bianchi, 2004: p. 499). Unsurprisingly, the opposing view argues that the large portion of the gain remains in second home developers' coffers and eventually siphoned out of these regions. Additionally, the gain by the locals is minimal in comparison to the long-term cost of environmental destruction and reduction of the economic base (<http://www.eghtesadonline.com/fa/content/25323/>).

5. Findings

Second home tourism development in the Caspian Sea region of Iran has experienced a trajectory of destruction and consumption. This form of tourism has become the main means of accumulation of profit by real estate firms at the expense of loss of viability of natural resources in the long term. This study focused on "second home complexes" with particular spatial ramifications on coastal areas and fragile environments. They are also characterized by the involvement of real estate firms from outside the Caspian Sea region dominated by pro-business and market-oriented approaches to development without any clear and shared policy and planning process. While there are no opportunities for communities in this region to ponder upon how to utilize their natural resources in a sustainable way, the answer to question (1) *Where are we going with second home tourism development?* remains ambiguous and uncertain as the process lacks broad and representative public participation, lacks informed public judgment, and is without any credible planning principles in place (Weeks, 2000). The legitimacy of the above question and its implications for the future manifested in:

The complexity of tourism planning and development projects, their vulnerability to the cultural, social, [environmental], and economic differences of host communities and tourists, uncertainty of the future outcomes, the failure of traditional practices to deal with intricate moral and ethical issues, as well as the need to make "moral choices and not just statistical calculations" call for broad, representative, inclusive and informed "non-expert" involvement in community tourism planning and development (as cited in Grybovyeh et al., 2011: p. 86).

Therefore, the future remains bleak for the Caspian Sea region, as communities do not possess any leverage over real estate firms, who are backed by the local government in their quest for short-term gain (Bianchi, 2004; Hatipoglu et al., 2014). The issue of power is at the center of this analysis in determining the future of second home development. The market-oriented approach to second home development is devoid of any planning foundation and is an embodiment of the community's powerlessness to influence the process. Flyvbjerg (2004) believes that 'there can be no adequate understanding of planning without placing the analysis of planning within the context of power' (p. 292). In the context of second home tourism development and tackling the second question, "power" plays a decisive role in understanding *who gains*, and *who loses* (i.e., the second question in *phronesis* research).

The processes of second home development in the Caspian Sea region resonate with Bianchi's (2004) belief in privatization of public spaces in the context of *lassies-faire* tourism, development where the regional planning system is in deficit. Asriran, in its latest

report (November 16, 2015) from the city of Gorgan in the Caspian Sea region, identified 163 cases of construction violation under investigation by authorities (<http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/431840/>). These forms of constructions by real estate firms are not limited to land use violations, but rather they have devastating implications for plants and animals. As Williams et al. (2015: p. 11) stated, ‘widespread biodiversity loss has resulted from the extension of human-generated “framed” ecosystems over wide areas of land, and the development of simpler trophic structures in marine ecosystems’.

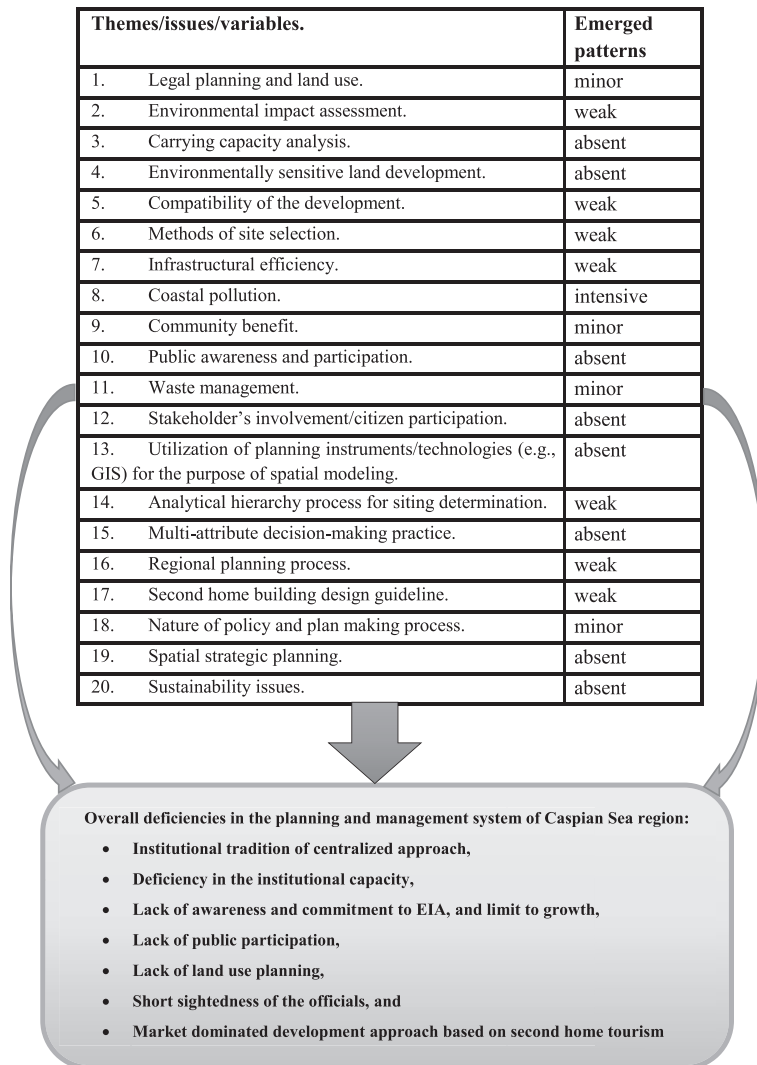
This study revealed that communities have never been provided with opportunities and conditions to be aware of their power in influencing the behavior of developers and their partners. As key players (developers and their allies) apply their own agendas, the answer to “who gains?” and “who loses?” becomes obvious. Communities are left out of the processes of second home development all together, while their public spaces are privatized. Bianchi (2004) has also noticed how high-profile tourism construction projects have intensified antagonisms and socio-spatial inequalities across regions. While communities cannot be partners in planning the second home development process and its direction, it is inconceivable that they will gain anything from it. This study revealed that

there is a connection between communities' knowledge of their power and its implications for the direction of second home development. As revealed through the interviews and based on thematic analysis of media, second home development in the Caspian Sea region is out of control. See also Table 3.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Examination of second home development was tested through the third question of *phronesis* research: “Is this development desirable, and, if yes, desirable from whose point of view, communities' point of view or developer's point of view?” This study revealed that communities' point of view has never been considered through the second home development process. When this issue was put to local government officials, they considered themselves as legitimate parties to make the final decision without local people's consent. A *laissez-faire* approach to second home development and lack of any *planning process* are conditions to disregard for achieving consensus (Hanna, 2005). Burby (2003), in his empirical assessment, discovered that when “publics” (e.g., community members) are not involved in the process of development, this provides conditions for the domination of the process by

Table 3
Data analysis and emerged patterns.



government officials and growth machines or corporate regimes (e.g., real estate firms). He continues that this makes the planning process problematic.

Nevertheless, planning process is a major task for the public sector institutions, then, part of their effort rests on public participation and community's input as major strategy (White, 2001). This study revealed that second home development in this case was desirable for real estate agents and their allies, as this allowed them to make profit. However, from the local people's point of view (who call this region their home), it would be desirable if second home development meant an improved economy, human development, employment, education and recreational opportunities, enhanced infrastructure, and environmental protection on a sustainable platform (Waligo et al., 2013; Billington et al., 2008).

Drawing its legitimacy from *phronesis*, the fourth question that was instrumental in the case study was "What, if anything, should we do about it?" By this, the authors did reflect upon the process of second home development through practical reasoning in the context of *phronesis*. As suggested by Grundy (1987), "[P]hronesis involves a combination of knowledge, judgment and 'taste', together producing a 'discernment' which is more than a mere skill.

Therefore, a region that is subjected to intensive second home development has never been given any opportunity to learn, improve, and innovate. In reference to the fourth *phronesis* question "What, if anything should we do about it"? the answer lies with the "civil society" and their potential role in the management and governance of the Caspian Sea region.

Their success story was explored and understood through *phronesis planning research* (Grybovych et al., 2011). Therefore, before second home tourism development inflicts further destruction on the Caspian region, facilitating the formation of a non-governmental organization composed of different socio-economic interests from the region to take control of these activities is of paramount importance for sustainable development in the region. Nevertheless, utilization of *phronesis planning research* paved the path for the comprehension of *phronesian strategy* with respect to the concept of sustainable development towards combining action and knowledge for the welfare of people in Caspian Sea region and its unique environment which is threatened by absence of 'practical wisdom' (Schram, 2012). However, with the present second home development framework, there is no engagement in sustainable development.

Limitation of the study is in the nature of phenomenological and *phronetic approach* as the sample size is small, thus, the results can be enriched and much more holistic if wider population (e.g., residents) are incorporated in the process of sampling and analysis. Notwithstanding the study's focus on public sector and strategic planning, different segments of residents/indigenous population might add new insights to the second home tourism phenomenon. A different study may look into various impacts of second home development, especially the environmental impact in a quantitative context with defined indicators.

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Appendix

Respondent #1 (public sector official): *seems to me you do not have knowledge of our system. Here a top-down decision-making structure is in place. As soon as permission is granted to a developer, he is on its own. If we apply the process of stakeholders' views*

and apply mechanisms such as public participation, this simply is not part of our culture of development in this region. These popular phrases of public involvement or stakeholder's views are attractive in the literature, but not necessarily in practice.

Respondent #2 (public sector official): *yes, we have laws and regulations and second home developers supposed to adhere to them; however, we are the legal body; there is no need for involving community as they are happy with present development of second home enterprises.*

Interviewer: *but the people through a proper process do not elect you; you are the government employee appointed by the central government.*

Respondent #3 (public sector official): *yes, you are right, but central government trusted us and gave us the authority to be the representative of people.*

A number of questions addressed the land use planning, spatial regional planning and overall statutory planning (i.e., comprehensive plan) and implementation of these plans.

Respondent #4 (public sector official): *you do not know how things work here, the process is so complex and development is so rapid, having these legal hurdles will slow down the process. Moreover, enforcement is out of question. Why we should have such process, as you see things are going fine and development is progressing. There is always someone who will be critical of the process, especially, the media, but it is not bad to have media saying these things.*

A number of questions raised the issues of environmental impact, destruction of ecosystems, reduction of biodiversity, coastal pollution, deforestation, and privatization of public space.

Respondent #4 (public sector official): *again, you are repeating the media propaganda. Well, they also get it wrong sometimes; they are fed by incorrect information.*

Interviewer: *have you applied a comprehensive environmental impact assessment to measure the negative and positive impacts?*

Respondent# 4 (an official in the Organization of Housing Development): *environmental issues have blown out of proportion; there is an institution in charge of impact assessment. If they have not reported any problem to us, we are not concerned with this issue; however, if we get a report from them, then we will act.*

Interviewer: *is it possible to look at some of the recent environmental impacts report for second home complexes in the study area?*

Respondent #4: *those reports are official documents; you need an official permission in order to observe them.*

Interviewer: *the region is highly attractive for the second home development. Are there land-use laws, design requirement, intensity limitations for Real Estate firms to follow; and how do you make sure they are implemented?*

Respondent#5 (an official in the municipality): *Yes, there are certain regulations and conditions before they construct anything. We check the sites every now-and-then; however, our office is not equipped to conduct a comprehensive investigation.*

Interviewer: Caspian Sea region is highly fragile with vulnerable ecosystems. There are some reports by the public in Iran that second home development is similar to frontier economy. Deforestation has been argued as one of the many problems because of such rush. Do you have a place specific strategy for Caspian Sea region?

Respondent#6 (an official in the municipality/environmental department): *the idea is a good one. Even if we had such strategy in place, it would be difficult to enforce. Most of the Real Estate firms are coming from capital and have strong connection.*

Interviewer: what is your opinion (as a professional), regarding the present state of second home development in this region?

Respondent #7 (a free-lance civil engineer and local resident): *Most of the second home complexes are located adjacent to watershed of the Caspian Sea or on the mountain slopes. The discharges are directly end up in the sea. The situation worsened, as there is no sewerage system. Most of the regulations, if there is any, not enforced by the local government. In this business, there are lots of favoritism and nepotism going on.*

Interviewer: would you please express your opinion regarding the overall problem that associated with the present second home development in the Caspian Sea region?

Respondent #8 (an architect and local resident): *In the last two decades the speed of second home development in the Caspian Sea region have been up to extreme. My mean, it was like a gold rush for Real Estate firms. Most of the firms are not from local areas, but from other regions, especially the capital city. As a local resident, I see how deforestation is changing the whole environment in this rare region. This region is the only part of the country with unique vegetation and species. If there is no some form of moratorium, the future viability of this region is in doubt.*

Interviewer: what do you suggest should happen in order to prevent such destruction?

Respondent # 8: *officials are aware what is happening here; media is filled with these discussions; in my opinion, there should be a moratorium and without government's own commitment to solve this problem, there is no hope. As you are aware, in a centralized political system, government is the only solution.*

We have also targeted four Real Estate agents as they are the main parties involved in second home building and construction in the market (Volo, 2011), as well as, considered root to displacement in second home tourism destinations (Marjavaara, 2008).

Interviewer: would you please be kind and explain the normal procedure for application to obtain permission for construction of second-complexes? please indicate the challenges in terms of conditions you need to meet and overall complications that your firm experiences? The aim of this interview was to explore the degree of subordination of everything to the economic realm and to the sovereignty of the market (Albrechts, 2015).

Respondent#9 (Real Estate agent): *over the last several years, it got really crazy as many Real Estate firms are competing for involving in construction of second home complexes in the Caspian Sea region. Demand for holiday home is increasing, especially with the construction of new motorway from capital city to the Caspian Sea area. The main challenge for us is the location of prime land; location with view and access to the beach. Our firm has not experienced any problem as long as we pay the permission fee.*

On a different occasion, we booked an interview with another Real Estate agent who represented an indigenous firm.

Respondent #10 (Real Estate agent): *... look, right now, the Caspian Sea region is similar to wild west. There is money to be made and this is benefiting the locals and second home buyers. The media and some so called environmentalists' comments about deforestation is not going to become an obstacle to this type of development. Thanks god no one takes them serious in this region.*

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