

## Chapter 34

# The Impact of COVID–19 on the Rural Second Home Tourism: Case of Eastern Black Sea Region, Turkey

**Ersin Türk**

*Karadeniz Technical University, Turkey*

**Aygün Erdoğan**

*Karadeniz Technical University, Turkey*

**Beytullah Sulak**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9117-6439>

*Karadeniz Technical University, Turkey*

**Gökhan Hüseyin Erkan**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0802-2146>

*Karadeniz Technical University, Turkey*

### **ABSTRACT**

*The aim of this study is to examine the level of satisfaction of second home users in the EBSR countryside due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For this purpose, a qualitative research based on in-depth interview technique using semi-structured questionnaire was applied to six households. Gürgenağaç Village within the borders of Trabzon Province, Maçka District was selected as the case area. The study provided results to discuss whether rural second homes, which are seen as insurance against risks, fulfill the expected task by virtue of the global pandemic experience and the problems arising from second homes and their surroundings. In conclusion, the study shows that behaviors and attitudes of rural second home owners had significantly changed with the COVID-19 pandemic.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Since its first emergence on Dec 31<sup>st</sup> in Wuhan City of Hubei State in China, and has been declared as pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020 more than a year has already passed. In addition to its significant impacts on social, cultural, geographical and political spheres, the economic sectors hit bottom by a deeper plunge than that of experienced in 2008 global crisis (IMF, 2020), which was the first one since the start of the new millennium. This second crises caused by the pandemic involved no exception for any sector where tourism fell down by severer stroke. Despite negativities concerning all the tourism activities (Demir et al., 2021) including mass tourism (TA, 2021), the second home tourism witnessed a different pattern providing an alternative means to escape from crowded cities that are seen as nest of pandemic.

The periphery of metropolitan areas, the coastal areas where tourism sector is developed, mountainous or rural areas with natural beauties that offer mountain hiking, skiing, and trekking opportunities are the places where second homes are acquired (Coppock, 1977; Huang and Yi, 2011). Kaltenborn and Clout (1998) specify the main influential factors in possessing a second home as recreation, relaxation and pragmatic causes and motivations.

Second homes, which form an important part of the tourism sector, have started to spread in Turkey since the 1970s especially on the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts. Demand for these homes that are used for holiday purposes in summer continues today. In the past, traditional transhumance, which constituted an important economic input for livestock breeding, eventually turned into upland tourism, especially in the Eastern Black Sea and Mediterranean uplands (Özden et al., 2004).

In a recent survey on the Eastern Black Sea Region (EBSR) countryside, the most frequent reasons for the rise of this phenomenon were ranked in decreasing order as; a seasonal living place during retirement, a vacation place for holidays, a future living place for children, and a kind of insurance for any crisis period (Sulak, 2014). Sense of belonging and psychological reasons such as longing for the village, meeting relatives and preserving the land as ancestor's heritage are other reasons for acquiring rural second homes. Owners of these homes feel as natives of the village where they were born and raised. They have been spending significant part of their summer holidays with their families every year and regard their villages as a constitutive element of their identity. Socially, permanent home owners and second home owners appear as part of an integrated community in these rural areas (Sulak, 2014).

The above mentioned survey found that 86% of second home owners regard their homes as an asset of assurance or a means to escape in case an unfavorable incident such as economic crisis or natural disaster occurs in their permanent residences. COVID-19 pandemic, which surrounded the entire world, is a typical form of such unfavorable incidents. In fact, COVID-19, which began in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and soon spread out and affected all countries, was declared as a "global pandemic" by WHO on 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, has caused anxiety in all settlements, especially in cities where more than half of the world's population is already living in. Measures related to mask use, physical distancing and hygiene that compose the main requirements for preventing the spread of the disease, have affected all aspects of social life and economy. In almost all countries, numerous activities of working, production, education, shopping, eating and drinking, sports, arts and culture have been restricted or prohibited for certain periods of time.

Recently, the disease is continuing to be threatening with its variants, and even before that, the WHO announced that the effects of this pandemic will continue. This situation, for all sectors including tourism, requires to determine what is happening and what the new approaches might be towards the

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