

Original Research Article

A Comparative Analysis of the Evolution of Public Space in the Ports of Hormozgan City under Economic and Cultural Paradigm Shifts (A Case Study: Laft, Kong, and Hormoz)*

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Abstract | Public spaces within cities play a crucial role as significant reflections of their identity and social history, characterized by unique features encompassing natural, geographical, economic dynamics, and cultural traditions. The economies of cities and ports in Hormozgan province, historically central to regional fishing and commerce, grapple with challenges related to sustainable development, including the deterioration of historical contexts, rapid population growth, restricted resource access, and environmental degradation. In this context, public spaces, integral focal points in the spatial structure of cities, have undergone changes and faced challenges indicative of these conflicts. The influence of the development-oriented economic and cultural shift shapes the characteristic features of public space, determining its form and functionality. This shift, in turn, either strengthens or weakens the emerging spaces under this role. This study aims to explore the impact of these economic and cultural changes on public spaces, shedding light on the forces that shape their development. The objective of this study is to assess the current state of public spaces and their contribution to sustainable development. The goal is to comprehend the underlying factors influencing the formation of these spaces within the spatial organization of the studied cities and ports, aiming to enhance their development processes. This research employed qualitative methods, relying on field observations, documentary and library studies, and an analytical approach to describe the phenomenon. Through a comparative analysis of the three examined samples, a consistent pattern emerges in the repositioning of public spaces within the spatial organization of the city. The primary catalyst for this shift lies in the creation of economic attractions driven by a rapid increase in tourism. Historically, fishing and shipping dominated the coastal cities' economy, shaping their structures. However, the current surge in the tourism economy, accompanied by lifestyle changes and increased capital attraction, has not only altered programmatic and financial dynamics but has also impacted the spatial organization of cities. This ongoing transformation, coupled with shifts in the region's economic structure, has resulted in fundamental changes to the cityscape, rooted in the dominance of the development discourse and native traditions. Consequently, the city's landscape and landmarks have undergone significant transformations.

Keywords | *Space, Maritime Urbanism, Coastal Infrastructure Development, Spatial Structure, Sustainable Development.*

Introduction | The geographical location of ports and cities in southern Iran—especially in the Hormozgan region—has historically attracted attention due to urbanization, water issues, and more recently, the growth of the tourism economy. This area has become a focal point for both domestic and foreign authorities aiming to accelerate development processes. However, this rapid growth and development could jeopardize

the continuation of traditions and the general social culture, potentially transforming the spatial organization of cities. This transformation affects not only the physical structure but also, more profoundly, the semantic aspect of cities. In this context, Tahereh Nasr's (2018, 231) perspective is noteworthy: "The components and elements that constitute the form of the city, their arrangement, and the element of time all possess the ability to evoke meaning, enhance the capacity for mental

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imagery, and create a sense of place and urban identity... Therefore, the image perceived by people is derived from the spatial organization of the city”.

By examining the spatial organization of port cities in southern Iran, which have been shaped by environmental factors such as climate, the sea, and the culture of the people, it becomes evident that the public spaces in these cities—serving as the main organs of social life and similar to most cities in Iran—have developed through a continuous dialogue with sacred spaces and under the influence of the predominant regional economy.

Public spaces possess a multifunctional structure—both political and social—and “reflect the socio-political dynamism of a specific time and place, serving as important venues for the display of social, cultural, and political narratives that remind of the power of a group” (Hatuka, 2012, 2020, 358).

The essence and functional dimensions of public space are influenced by a series of relationships akin to a chain reaction and the butterfly effect. A small change in the macroeconomic, political, and social processes of a city, a slight alteration in the initial conditions of public space, individual or group human actions, or even the transformation of the context of a public space in another part of the city can lead to extensive and unpredictable outcomes in the general nature of the space (Abraghouie Fard et al., 2023a, 97).

Public spaces in the port cities of Hormozgan have similarly served as venues for social interactions and reflections on local traditions and customs. Over time, these public spaces have undergone formal, locational, and substantive changes due to urban development, as well as social, economic, and natural changes. The spatial transformations of social interaction space in Hormozgan’s port cities provide a readable example of these changes. Therefore, understanding the components influencing their formation and location can aid in refining and rearranging urban landscape elements and contribute to the sustainable development of the city. This understanding can also play a crucial role in urban planning for predicting the locations of social interactions.

The present study, through comparative analysis and case study evaluation of the port cities in Hormozgan province, aims not only to understand the roots of spatial and physical changes in the city’s structure but also to assist in redirecting development orientations in these areas. This will help in making foundational and spatial changes in the port cities to support decision-making for sustainable development policy.

As a result, understanding the dominant economic and cultural discourse in the climate of port cities allows for the comprehension of past trends and the prediction of future transformations in urban landscapes. Within this framework, the primary research questions for analyzing the topic and establishing a connection between maritime-based development policies and the structure of port cities in Hormozgan province are as follows:

- Identifying the factors influencing the formation and spatial changes of public spaces in the port cities of Hormozgan province.

-Determining the impact of trends influencing the development process on the structure of urban public spaces and how to intervene in them.

Indirectly, these two main questions lead to a broader third question regarding the role of local and national governance in the development of public spaces in the port cities of Hormozgan and how this role can be improved from a sustainable development perspective.

Research Hypothesis

The relocation of public spaces in the southern port cities of Iran, which serve as social arenas for interaction with sacred spaces, the economy, and the neighborhood structure, to new urban spaces (in terms of location and activity) is a result of the economic paradigm shift influenced by the promotion of the tourism economy and the subsequent cultural-social changes in port cities. These arenas of social interactions have increasingly moved from former centers (mostly influenced by the commercial economy and the location of mosques and religious buildings) towards the sea (as a pivotal point and resultant vector of previous structures and new trends). With the diminishing of ritual traditions, generational changes, and the recognition of new capacities of the port and sea (tourism), the location and function of public spaces have gradually transformed or been relocated in a new form. This phenomenon, in a reciprocal process, also indicates a change in the values and dominant cultural-economic discourse of Hormozgan’s port cities.

Research Method

The present study employs a qualitative research approach, specifically of the descriptive-analytical type, grounded in field observations, library research, and documentary reviews. This research aims to conduct a comparative analysis of information from two perspectives: changes and impacts, using a holistic view and detailed observation. Additionally, interviews with officials and residents played a significant role in the formulation of the research problem and hypotheses, serving as the basis for analyzing the studied structures and describing the phenomenon’s status. The comparative analysis method used in this research involves describing and explaining the similarities and differences in conditions or outcomes among large-scale social units such as regions, nations, societies, and cultures (Ghaffari, 2011). It seeks to analyze the effect of major discursive changes in the region’s economy and culture on the spatial organization of the port cities in Hormozgan through a deductive analysis of the results of these changes within a similar temporal and contextual framework.

Literature Review

In examining the research conducted on public spaces in the port cities of southern Iran and their changes and influences from overarching factors, four distinct groups of studies can be identified and categorized:

- The first group of studies, focusing on development policy, considers the role of governance (both macro and local) to be paramount in influencing changes in the spatial structure of cities. An example is Mehran Alalhesābi's (2011) article titled "Participatory Rural Planning Empirical Study on the Role of Villagers in Planning Rural Development," which highlights the role of local decision-makers in development and posits that the cognitive changes among people regarding the development potential of ports and attracting tourists are key factors in the location of event-centered hubs along the coast and piers. However, this group of studies often fails to comprehensively explain the subject of urban public spaces and the factors influencing their construction, typically providing a shallow analysis of public space structures to emphasize the desired factor (governance and policy).

- Parallel to this approach, the second group of studies focuses extensively on the environmental qualities of port cities, largely overlooking the impact of gradual changes in macroeconomic, cultural, and social paradigms on urban structural changes. These studies tend to address the physical and semantic aspects of urban space primarily from the perspective of architects and urban planners. An example from this group is the article by Alipour et al. (2012) titled "Surveying Environment Quality Indicators in Detection of Interfering Priorities in the Deteriorated Fabric of Bandar Lengeh city" which evaluates the traditional fabric of Bandar Lengeh as deteriorated and attributes the loss of identity, functionality, and urban dynamism to this factor, suggesting that the semantic and physical degradation of existing environments leads to the creation of new urban spaces in these areas.

- The third group of studies has examined the role of tourism and ecotourism in Qeshm and the Hormozgan province, often seeking to elucidate the dependency of sustainable development on the enhancement of tourism. For instance, Mohammad Akbarpour Saraskanroud & Noorbakhsh (2010), in his research titled "The role of ecotourism in sustainable urban and rural development: A case study of Qeshm Island," and Ghanbari & Hossiennia (2021), in his article "Examining the Impact of Empowering Deteriorated Urban Fabrics on Promoting Ecotourism," have explored the link between the tourism economy and the development of Qeshm. However, what is absent in this category of articles is an examination of the chain-like impact of the dominance of the tourism economy on the construction of public spaces in port cities and the resulting changes. Most of the studies in this group have viewed changes from an external perspective, treating all factors, including the city's spatial structure, as secondary and subordinate to the development and tourism economy.

- Among these, a small group (the fourth category) of articles has theoretically addressed the criteria for the formation of public spaces, considering the impact of the interaction between the macro-level agency of the people and power institutions, and examining the multifaceted dimensions influenced by various social, economic, and political forces. Examples include "Narrative Review of Pertinent Theories on 'Public Space' in Cities." and "A Theory of Good Form of Public Space» A Critical Review of the Criteria for the Formation of Efficient Public Space", written by Abraghouie Fard et al. (2023a, 2023b). A critique of this latest group is the lack of prioritization and weighting of the factors influencing changes in urban public spaces. Despite adopting a holistic view and mentioning key influencing factors, there remains a gap in understanding how these overarching factors impact one another and the structure of urban public spaces.

Adopting a landscape approach to this subject, with an understanding of the priority of overarching and influential factors, the internal relationships among these factors, and their impact on the structure of the port cities in Hormozgan, alongside the comparative analysis of specific case studies, forms the research strategy of the present study to fill the existing gaps in the literature of this group of studies.

Theoretical Foundations

• The role of public space in Iranian cities

Public space, as one of the critical elements in the spatial organization of a city, is an abstract phenomenon that gains meaning and value through human activities and interactions. Generally, public spaces are essential for urban sustainability due to political, social, economic, public health, and biodiversity reasons (Banerjee, 2001). Beyond being mere stages for everyday life, public spaces have a multifunctional structure. Historically, public spaces have served as integrated nodes addressing various instrumental (individual) and expressive (collective) needs. Today, they are considered places for individual and community growth in political, social, and cultural contexts, personal and group expression, dialogue and debate, leisure, gatherings, festivals, protests, economic activities, and information exchange (Mehta & Palazzo, 2020, 2; Madanipour, 2010, 10; Mehta, 2014, 55; Hou, 2010, 2; Barati et al., 2019, 14). Consequently, public space possesses a multifunctional structure that simultaneously addresses various aspects of citizens' lives and the diverse needs of human subjects. Therefore, the physical aspect of public space is not merely the tangible manifestation of design and legal determinations; rather, it is an active element in materializing its socio-cultural and political dimensions (Harvey, 2012; Crestani & Brandão, 2018; Crestani & Irazábal, 2020, 390).

In pre-Islamic cities, it appears that the formation of space was more influenced by sacred elements than by the flow of life and human relationships. The construction of cities was often accompanied by the building of fire temples and the

establishment of the Bahram fire inside or outside the city (Kārnāme-ye Ardešīr Bābakān quoted in Haghighi Borujeni & Rahravi Poodeh, 2021, 376). From the 1st to the 4th century AH, the construction of mosques was another significant aspect of Islam's influence on the physical transformation of Iranian cities. Although cities during these centuries witnessed transformations in the form of the congregational mosque and its relationship with the urban spatial structure, what remained consistent throughout this period was the role of mosques as social hubs. During this time, the mosque served as the central nucleus of the city, and consequently, in most cities, mosques were situated in a way that they had multiple entrances connecting to the surrounding urban fabric, continually serving as passageways for residents and sites for daily face-to-face interactions (Haghighi Borujeni & Rahravi Poodeh, 2021, 380). Generally, during this period, mosque courtyards and tree-lined streets were the primary venues for social interactions and the formation of public space. From the 4th to the 7th century in Iran, there was significant growth in art and urbanization. With the elimination of the courtyards of congregational mosques (the main city mosques, not local neighborhood mosques) from the collection of public open spaces in most cases, urban squares with public functions emerged.

After this historical period until the beginning of the Safavid era, communal spaces experienced a steady progression, which can be attributed to the gradual evolution of urban culture. For instance, urban squares from the 7th to the 11th centuries accommodated more diverse activities compared to earlier periods (ibid., 392).

In summary, the role of public spaces in the spatial organization of Iranian cities can be explained by their historically vital and multifaceted role in structuring the city. Due to the historical correlation between the spiritual domain in Iranian society and everyday life, the construction of public spaces has also been influenced by this relationship. In pre-Islamic times, public

spaces were formed under the influence of sacred elements. Later, with the advent of Islam, this trend continued with mosques becoming the central hubs of cities, serving as venues for social interactions and spatial transformations. From the 4th to the 7th century AH, with the growth of urbanization and art, local centers associated with religious sites and markets expanded as new public spaces. During the Safavid period, communal spaces continued their evolution, with urban squares covering a broader scale and more diverse activities. Today, following this trajectory and the introduction of global urban planning logic into the urban planning system, public spaces are considered places for individual and community growth in political, social, and cultural contexts, leisure, gatherings, and social interactions. These spaces, with their multifunctional structure and continuous interaction with societal values, play a crucial role in urban sustainability and in materializing the socio-cultural and political dimensions.

• **The relationship between sustainable development and public space**

Sustainable development encompasses three dimensions: economic, social, and ecological. These dimensions have a distinct structure and a hierarchical system (Fig. 1). Moreover, each of these dimensions carries its specific weight within sustainable development. The determination of the weight of each dimension depends on the characteristics of the subject under study (Birkmann, 2000. as cited in Akbarpour Saraskanroud & Noorbakhsh, 2010).

Public space in a city, as a platform for social and cultural life, can evaluate the balance and social development status of a community within the discourse of sustainable development. Changes in these types of spaces can also indicate changes in the spatial organization and form of the city, reflecting the manner of urban development, which pertains to the economic and ecological dimensions of development.

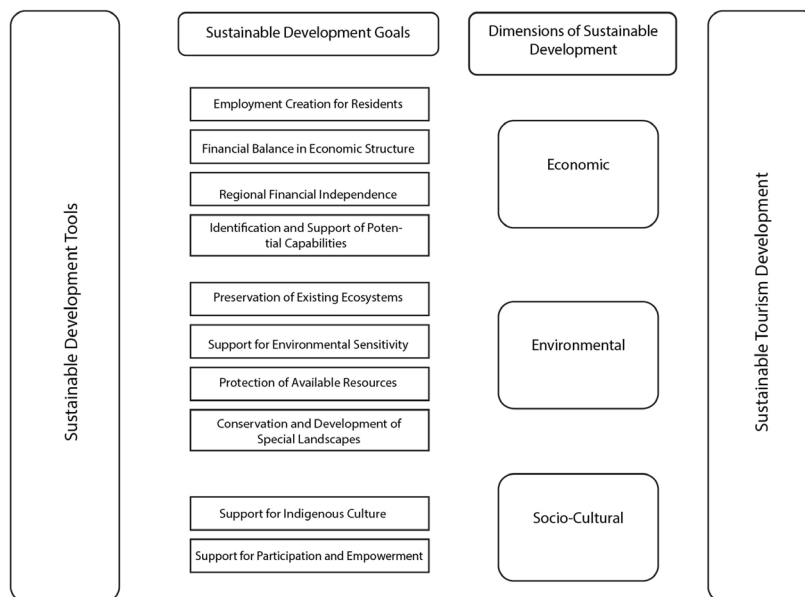


Fig. 1. Dimensions of Sustainable Development, Source: Akbarpour Saraskanroud & Noorbakhsh, 2010.

A comparative study of the case samples in this research, all of which have experienced spatial, formal, and even identity changes in the public spaces of port cities, can serve as a basis for studying current development trends—generally influenced by economic development in favor of the tourism economy. This approach can elucidate the relationship between these development programs and sustainable development.

Given the concepts of sustainable development, the transformation of the location and character of public spaces must possess two characteristics: social participation and preservation of cultural principles. The participation of local communities in decision-making processes and development plans is essential for social sustainability.

On the other hand, such transformations typically accompany urbanization characterized by one-dimensional development, often leading to the elimination of indigenous populations. Following short-term economic booms and the provision of temporarily profitable facilities, long-term saturation of economic activities results in housing price inflation and livelihood challenges, ultimately leading to the elimination or transformation of indigenous populations into temporary residents. This process simultaneously traps economically disadvantaged groups into spatial segregation, expelling them from economically productive contexts on the island, and coercing continuous migration towards cheaper and underdeveloped areas. Spatial and territorial constraints on the island, coupled with population growth, severely limit ecological opportunities and spatial expansion. Consequently, there is a steep decline in the integrity of previous neighborhoods and local structures (Darvishi, 2022). Therefore, sustainable development strategies must prioritize the preservation of the social and cultural heritage of the region. Establishing ethnographic museums and event-centered hubs in cities like Kong and Laft underscores the significance of climatic architecture, handicrafts, local cuisine, and attire, evident in new interactive centers. These positive signs highlight the semi-autonomous agency of local communities in preserving the traditions and historical biodiversity of indigenous peoples, contributing to the sustainable development of these centers.

Pathology of Transformations in Port Cities of Hormozgan Province

• Urban fabric deterioration

The disruption in the continuity of the region's indigenous architecture and the lack of urban fabric renewal over extended periods has led to the predominant urban fabric of southern Hormozgan's port cities suffering from physical deterioration, infrastructure degradation, urban disarray, and a general public misunderstanding of the city's identity. This issue has resulted in a decreased quality of life and damage to the social structure of the community.

Socially, the old urban fabric of Hormozgan's port cities, due to its age, deterioration, and consequent destruction, along with

a lack of urban facilities and infrastructure, has failed to meet the needs of modern life. As a result, the indigenous population residing in these areas has migrated to the outskirts of the cities, and migrants and low-income groups have replaced them. Consequently, the old urban areas have become hotspots for deviant behaviors, social anomalies, and delinquency. Living in such areas is associated with depression, disorder, chaos, and a lack of social participation (Felix & El-Daghar, 2019, as cited in Ghanbari & Hossiennia, 2021, 12). Deterioration contributes to the erasure of collective memories, the decline of eventful urban life, and the emergence of mundane urban existence. This factor, by accelerating the aging of structures, leads to a swift progression towards the end of their useful life (Habibi, 1996, as cited in Mousavi, 2017).

The unbalanced expansion of cities and neglect of historical fabrics have led to the deterioration and inefficiency of their interactive spaces. This phenomenon is evident in the case studies, such as in Bandar Kong, where despite the restoration of its historical fabric, the renovation was limited to the outer layer and executed in a localized and museum-like manner, failing to reintegrate collective life into the fabric.

Another manifestation of this deterioration is seen in the unbalanced and unplanned expansion of port cities, which results in the rapid degradation of newly constructed buildings within these urban fabrics. Due to the economic incapability of the residents and their tendency to build residential buildings with minimal costs, buildings are initially constructed with a useful life span of less than 10 years, quickly adding to the deteriorated urban fabric. This issue has also affected new urban fabrics, entangling the development of port cities with low construction quality and deterioration for years.

According to estimates by officials from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, over 41,000 hectares of deteriorated urban fabric exist in more than 911 cities in Iran. The government can only provide about 12.11% of the necessary funds for the renewal of these deteriorated areas, with the remainder needing to be secured through citizen participation. Significant portions of Qeshm, especially in the northern outskirts and along the coast, are facing considerable inefficiencies (JICA, 2019).

• Economic equations

The traditional fishing methods in Qeshm Island, are characterized by low productivity, lack of continuity between some of the islands and their isolation, weak communication networks between islands and central port cities, migration of residents from some islands of Qeshm County, smuggling, and the stagnation of productive economic activities such as fishing in certain islands, are among the main weaknesses and deficiencies in the economic equations of the region (Akbarpour Saraskanroud & Noorbakhsh, 2010, 73). These factors have increasingly driven the residents of Qeshm Islands and the port cities of Hormozgan Province towards the tourism industry.

Tourism, while potentially playing a significant role in the economic development, livelihood, and progress of a city, can also bring about detrimental effects if sustainable development and balanced planning are not adhered to at the city level. In the studied cases, the concentration of tourist activities along the coastal areas has led to the attraction of investment and the attention of officials towards the renovation and enhancement of local amenities in these areas. The growth of the tourism industry has resulted in the emergence and flourishing of new public spaces such as parks, museums, and cultural sites in these cities, attracting public interest and leading to the formation of new interactive spaces. These new interactive spaces are not only different in terms of location but also, due to their formation under the influence of the tourism industry and its demands, they cater primarily to tourists with diverse cultures and backgrounds. Consequently, they are fundamentally different in nature from the past public spaces of these port cities, generally serving as spaces “for tourists,” with limited or service-oriented use by the local community.

The discussion of sustainable tourism in Western societies dates back to the early 1970s, emphasizing the necessity for development planning to adhere to sustainable strategies and to promise stability and sustainability for a region or a country. Therefore, development planning and tourism industry activities must be comprehensive and inclusive, involving all sectors so that various governmental organizations, private companies, and individuals can participate and benefit from them (Monshizadeh, 2005, 152). According to the World Tourism Organization: “Tourism development is an effective factor in combating poverty, providing suitable grounds for increasing the income of different strata, reducing disease, fostering economic prosperity, and consequently improving the quality of life and social welfare of people, especially in less developed countries” (Aarabi, 2006).

The port cities of Hormozgan, due to the aforementioned challenges in updating and industrializing their traditional economic forms in fishing and trade (maritime and road), have faced multiple economic and social challenges, leading to a state of economic stagnation. In this context, the tourism industry emerged as a solution for improving the economic and social conditions of the region. The growth of tourism in Qeshm has not only increased investment and attention towards infrastructure renovation but also led to the creation of new public spaces and economic prosperity. However, the lack of adherence to sustainable development principles and balanced planning has brought serious negative effects to this renewal and development process, particularly affecting the structure of these port cities. The new spaces are no longer designed for the daily life of the residents but primarily for tourists. This underscores the need for a reassessment of the overarching development frameworks of the region to fully harness the benefits of tourism through comprehensive planning and inclusive participation, ensuring that all segments

of society benefit from this transformation and that the balance between local needs and those of tourists is maintained.

• Changes in urban planning

Due to its unique geographical location as the largest island in the Persian Gulf, Qeshm Island holds significant ecological, economic, and political importance. In recent years, driven by the promotion of new types of tourism, the development of this city has garnered attention from officials and attracted localized investments. The tourism development policies of Hormozgan Province, including the port cities studied in this research (due to their historical background and distinct climatic features), have also encompassed these areas. However, an examination of the development plans carried out in this context and upstream development plans reveals an imbalance in urban development approaches. Most of the implemented and ongoing plans have predominantly focused on tourism economy policies, with the traditional fabric and needs of the local population receiving less attention, except where they intersect with this economy. An example of this imbalanced approach can be seen in the revitalization of the indigenous fabric of the port city of Kong, which has been executed with a purely tourism-centric and physical perspective.

The prioritization of the tourism economy in urban development plans essentially calls for the development of long-denied infrastructures and unrealized developments in these regions. There is even a recognition of the changes and potential damages from this hasty, single-dimensional development approach in some conducted programs and studies: “Today, tourism plays an important role in reviving and diversifying the economies of communities, but it can also cause changes in the social, economic, and living environment of areas; the effects and consequences of this activity on society will manifest physically, economically, or socially... The city can increase the benefits while minimizing negative impacts” (Elahi Manesh et al., 2018, 64).

This concept has become so ingrained in the logic of urban planning systems in these port cities that even the criticisms of these programs are often from the perspective of “inequitable distribution and deep disparity in the availability of tourism infrastructure in Hormozgan’s counties (Nazmfar et al., 2017, 61),” rather than neglecting other aspects of development and the imposed changes on the city’s structure.

It is worth noting that this issue has generally led urban development policies, driven by the attraction of the sea for tourists and the desire to quickly reap the economic benefits of their presence, to focus on the seaside. Consequently, the location of public and interactive spaces in the city has shifted accordingly.

• Changes in culture and social behaviors

With changes in priorities, the ability to compare conditions and facilities, and increased communications, a shift in people’s lifestyles is natural and typically occurs over time in all societies.

In the case of the port cities of Hormozgan Province, this shift has been rapid and different from the natural evolution of traditions due to the increased attention from tourists over the past decade. This change has accelerated with the local community's observation and interaction with the different lifestyles of tourists, influencing the collective subconscious of the local society and providing a basis for changes in social behaviors, particularly among the younger population. This social behavior change can sometimes be seen positively in the presence of artists like Ahmad Nadalian, who, despite initial resistance from the local population, have managed to turn this process into an endogenous and productive effort through mutual cultural acceptance, education, and local micro-economy integration.

However, on the contrary, social behavior changes with the influx of young people from major cities with their unique lifestyles, and the interaction of less affluent local residents with the middle and sometimes affluent urbanites with specific lifestyles, increasingly create the possibility of lifestyle changes among the younger generations of Hormozgan's port cities. This issue can be traced within the spatial organization of the port cities through increased demand for recreational public spaces aligned with the new lifestyle of the people. Over time, this will gradually lead to the decline and disappearance of traditional urban spaces and the transformation of the primary elements of the spatial organization of port cities as the local community aligns with new and integrated values.

Discussion: Case Study Analysis

• Hormoz Island

In recent years, due to the extensive attention of tourists, significant changes have occurred across Hormoz Island. While the traditional urban fabric remains dilapidated, chaotic, and neglected, investments and physical changes have been confined to specific tourist areas. Consequently, the construction of new public spaces and the renovation of urban pathways have predominantly occurred along the coastal margins to meet the needs of tourists. An example of this can be seen in the transformation of the coastal fringe near the island's tourist dock, where new public spaces have emerged through the urbanization of sidewalks and street furniture, the location of recreational service facilities, and the consequent relocation of public urban spaces.

While the central and traditional parts of Hormoz Island remain in a state of disrepair, with narrow, dusty alleys and no signs of vibrant social life (Fig. 2), the areas surrounding tourist centers, such as the entrance area of the Hormoz marine terminal, have garnered significant attention. The renovations in these areas, combined with the presence of cafes, restaurants, and handicraft vendors (Fig. 3), have attracted tourists and encouraged local residents to abandon their previous, often arduous jobs in favor of service-oriented employment in these areas amid the unemployment crisis.

The review of ongoing plans for Hormoz Island by local managers reveals that these efforts are limited to paving urban pathways and completing the island's ring road. It appears that the emphasis on superficial beautification and physical manifestations of urban prosperity has taken precedence over the reconstruction and development of public spaces and their deep role in social life and the preservation of local culture. With the continued attention and extensive influx of tourists, it seems that reducing development policies to a purely physical and tourist-centric perspective will lead to the erosion of the city's identity elements (public spaces) and its unsustainable development.

• Kong Port

Kong Port, with a history spanning over 3000 years, has a cohesive and integrated port fabric that dates back to pre-Islamic Iran and was registered as a national monument in 2002. "Since the time of Karim Khan Zand, the ease of maritime communication... brought extraordinary commercial prosperity to Lengeh and Leng, and the existence of a short caravan route...



Fig. 2. The dilapidated pathways of the traditional Hormoz fabric in contrast with the renovated pathways along the island's periphery. Photo: Author's archive.

added to the commercial importance of these two ports” (Muscati, 2008, as cited on Mofidi Shemirani et al., 2013, 65). This highlights the historical background of this port city and the dominant economy of Kong in its historical development process.

In recent years, this port has attracted numerous tourists under the influence of tourism-oriented development through the restoration and renovation of its historical fabric. Even though eco-tourism accommodations, cafes, and service-tourism units have grown within the fabric during this development (Fig. 4) and are in a relatively better state compared to the previous example, the situational and greenhouse-like approach has still driven the predominant

urban development trends to follow the maritime economy and tourism, pulling the urban spaces towards the coastal areas.

Experiences such as the Anthropology Museum (Fig. 5) and event-centric centers along the coast are emerging evidence of this discursive and spatial transformation in the Kong Port, attracting large numbers of local people and tourists at different times of the day. The coastal park has been well-received by the people for creating social spaces.

• Laft Port

The initial core of Laft village was formed in the ancient and central part of the current village, near the water wells and reservoirs and along the coast. As



Fig. 3. Renovation of pedestrian paths and streets along the Hormoz Island periphery indicating attention to the waterfront fabric. Photo: Author's archive.



Fig. 4. Physical restoration of the historical fabric and efforts to create collective spaces. Photo: Author's archive.

the space between the coast and the low hills filled up, the village expanded north-south along the coast (Akbarpour Saraskanroud & Noorbakhsh, 2010). Field studies of this town show that the traditional public space of the town, located in the center of this neighborhood and next to the town mosque, served as a venue for traditional ceremonies and public gatherings (Fig. 6). Unlike Laft's narrow, shaded alleys, the space next to this mosque is quite open and includes places for lighting candles for rituals, which also provides lighting and safety for the public. Such integration of social traditions and urban life has led to the creation of multifaceted services and amenities for the locals. Currently, it appears that the previous importance of this space has diminished in the face of new developments and the construction of new spaces, continuing its existence as part of the traditional fabric with less vibrancy than before. Conversely, a new social center has developed along the coast, focused on the tourism economy and consisting of event-centric centers, libraries, cafes, and new public spaces along the Laft shoreline. These spaces represent the new approach

to public space construction, more influenced by the tourism economy than by serving the local population (Fig. 7).

• Summary of the discussion

Library research, field observations, and interviews with local residents and officials initially indicate that public spaces in port cities are undergoing spatial and identity changes. These changes are evident in the diminishing interactive spaces within the urban fabric and the development of similar spaces along the coastline as new recreational areas such as museums, parks, and cafes.

A deeper analysis of the case studies reveals the dominance of an economically tourist-centric environment and the shift in the discourse accepted by macro and local management, media, and investment. These changes significantly influence the transformation of public spaces in port cities. This focus on new economic attractions has generally placed the “context and identity” of these cities—comprising the natural continuation of urban organisms, the needs of the local population, and the historical and civilizational roots of the port cities—at a lower priority (Table 1).

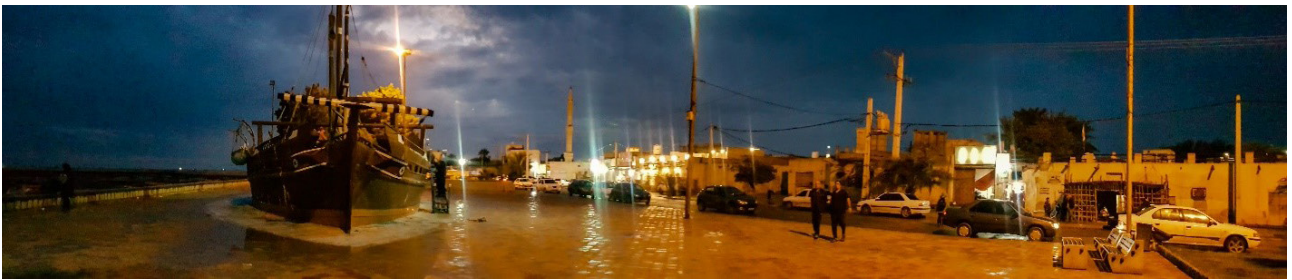


Fig. 5. Anthropology Museum and the public space in front of it along the coast, which has become a new collective space with a vibrant nightlife. Photo: Author's archive.



Fig. 6. Traditional collective space in the historical fabric of Laft, related to the mosque and traditional rituals. Photo: Author's archive.



Fig. 7. Renovation and construction along the coastal margin aimed at creating new collective spaces. Photo: Author's archive.

Given the rapid changes in cities, ports, and port cities, it is crucial to thoroughly examine the forces driving these changes. This examination aims to understand the systemic issues of unilateral city growth and the invasion of the tourism economy, which can lead to unsustainable development, irreversible changes in the city's spatial organization, and neglect of traditional fabrics resulting in their decay, and the destruction and loss of the local culture.

Conclusion

The port cities and islands of southern Iran have always held significant strategic value—whether in terms of regional

political geography, maritime-based economy, or cultural heritage. The spatial organization of these cities reflects the simultaneous interplay of these elements. Over time, with generational changes and shifts in the dominant economic activities of the population, as well as the social and economic equations linked to these changes, the public spaces within the traditional neighborhood fabric have not only lost their previous functions but have also been reproduced in new forms, often relocating towards the coast.

This phenomenon is observed in the traditional cities of Hormozgan, such as Laft, Kong, and Hormoz Island, with their noteworthy historical backgrounds, urban structures,

Table 1. Summary of Case Studies with Categorized Areas of Change Focus and Determination of Their Dominant Development Paradigm. Source: Author.

City / Port City Under Study	Studied Space	Pathology / Focus Areas of Change Categorized Scope				Dominant Development Paradigm
		Urban Fabric Deterioration	Economic Equations	Changes in Urban Planning	Changes in Culture and Social Behavior	
Hormoz Island	Coastal public and tourist spaces / traditional and central urban fabric					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dominance of the tourism economy over other local economic sectors - Unbalanced development
Kong Port	Historical fabric streets and connected public spaces / coastal public spaces					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Museum-like development - Change in local economic patterns by activating tourism economy capacities
Laft Port	Public space in the historical city center (public space around the mosque, Talos, passage openings) / public space around the sea					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preservation of historical urban space patterns - Change in social centers with a shift in local economic patterns and activation of tourism-related spaces

and established traditions—where public spaces were typically created within the urban fabric, opening adjacent to sacred places and at the centers of neighborhoods. This process has led to:

- Capital-driven development is dominated by the tourism economy, creating skepticism toward traditional living patterns and their derived values.
- The city's landscape, as a readable text of social and structural changes, responds gradually to these doubts and offers new public spaces that cater to its new audience, i.e., tourists.
- The expansion of these port cities towards the sea focuses on event-driven activities and new social centers near the coasts.

The root of this phenomenon and the accelerating factor of this change can be attributed to various elements such as

generational shifts, changes in economic relationships, and the tourism-oriented approach of these cities.

From the perspective of sustainable development, the sustainability, correction, and optimization of this structural change lie in the continuous interaction with local community values, the use of traditional landscape practices, and addressing the needs of the local community while providing services to visitors. In this framework, the tourism industry holds significant importance. However, the necessity of preserving the traditional fabric and supporting the local culture of Qeshm demands that development within the city be homogeneous, considering the identity characteristics of each port city in the province, adhering to the three principles of economic, ecological, and social development as outlined in the discourse of sustainable development.

Endnotes

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