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## Viewpoint\Critical Review

# Analyzing the Consequences of Unbalanced Place-Based Development in the Villages of Kuhdasht from a Social Perspective\*

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### Abstract

Rural areas play a key role in the development process and significantly contribute to the advancement of development plans. Unbalanced and non-dominant development leads to different forms of colonization in rural areas. Social damage, which is one of the consequences of unbalanced development, affects the location of the village. Development programs seem to act as the driving force behind social changes and developments in rural areas. This study attempts to analyze case studies to find the impact of development on the location of villages and understand how development plans and social changes can lead to fundamental changes in locational development. The research employs an analytical-interpretive approach to investigate the evaluation of case studies. Data were collected through field observation of the villages of Khosro Abad, Sorkhdom Laki, and Abu al-Wafa. Moreover, available published works and upstream documents were used to complete the information. Finally, the data were analyzed using a comparative method and interpreted. The results of the research show that development plans can have a significant impact on village location and identity by providing balanced development conditions for villages, systematic management, economic progress, and improving social indicators.

**Keywords:** *Unbalanced development, Quality of place, Place-based development, Colonial development.*

### Problem Statement

To what extent can unbalanced development contribute to the development process of villages as a whole? Development is a state of social transformation that humans create to achieve their needs and desires in the environment. We use the term balanced development when the transformation created in the social and biological environment is aimed at meeting the needs and desires of humans and provides the ground for sustainable development. If the changes made in the social and

environmental environment are not aligned with these needs, then we use the term unbalanced development (Seyfollahi, 2018). Development in rural areas often focuses on physical dimensions, and its effects on the surrounding community have been ignored. Development plans are generally influenced by the physical potential of the place. The development process can be considered unbalanced and colonial, or it can be classified as progressive and balanced development. Balanced development first causes economic prosperity. As a result, other social dimensions and capacities of the place will be on the path of growth, and all the meaning-giving dimensions of the place will prosper in line with the development. In this research, the consequences and causes of the success or failure of

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place-based development plans from the social dimension in villages are studied by examining cases. In the process of planning for the development of rural areas, it is very important to pay attention to the capacities and to know the existing and natural context of the village. In this process, determining the levels of enjoyment and development of rural areas and investigating the strengths and weaknesses of the conditions of each area in economic, social, cultural, and physical fields provides the groundwork for the optimal allocation of resources and facilities for the coordinated, integrated, and balanced development of villages. The term rural development refers to the improvement of the economic status and social changes of the people living in rural areas, which leads to the improvement of income, health, education, facilities, drinking water, energy supply, housing facilities, transportation, and communication facilities in the villages (Shaban & Bhole, 2000). In Marxist-Leninist literature, colonialism is considered a form of exploitation, and the emphasis is on economic variables, but in anthropological literature, it is viewed as a process of sociocultural change (Horvath, 1972 cited in Zandieh et al., 2021). Colonialism is an example of conquering and dominating an area, which is not done by the central government but by external forces and with goals such as the exploitation of God-given resources and wealth, manpower, and geographical location, which is a more comprehensive view that can serve as a platform for the formation of communication that is considered cultural (King, 1974 cited in Zandieh et al., 2021). Colonialism has various manifestations in various fields such as economic, political, and social relations, etc., and in its wake causes new human and spatial patterns. Along with physical aspects such as spatial structure, form, urban forms, and construction patterns, these patterns also reveal meanings and concepts that represent the thought processes of the colonial system as a factor of power and dominance (King, 2015). Colonialism in place-based development refers to the fact that development in a particular region or community is directed by external entities, such as government agencies, international organizations, or private companies, in a way that can undermine the

autonomy of the local population. In the context of place-based development, this colonization may manifest as the imposition of development projects, policies, or strategies that are not aligned with the cultural, social, or economic realities of the local community. In this research, the consequences of place-based development in villages are investigated from the social dimension. The main problem is to find the effects of the existing development plan on the place-oriented development process, and the research hypothesizes that if the development is done in a balanced way, place-oriented development will be formed.

### Critical Literature Review

Place-based development in villages can be seen as an opportunity for revitalization within the village. Development works if it is progressive and balanced in all aspects, such as economic, social, and other aspects. If the development process in a field suffers from monopoly, the development will be unbalanced and inhibiting. This study examines the social aspects of the consequences of non-place-based development in the villages of Sorkhdom Laki, Khosro Abad, and Abu al-Wafa. Different countries and regions of the world have adopted different rural development strategies based on their conditions, priorities, and approaches. It is not possible to achieve much success just by creating jobs in the villages without considering the rural development strategy and the global experiences in this field. It is important to know that job creation and entrepreneurship occur in a suitable environment, and without such an environment, it is practically impossible to expect sustainable success (Estelaji, 2002, 252). One of the approaches and strategies of rural development is the socio-cultural approach, which was used in this study. Based on the observations, the people of the investigated villages are nomads, and the limited life span of the villages and the lack of integrated management in rural management in terms of infrastructure and livelihood facilities have been major culprits in a wide range of challenges in the rural areas and the gradual reduction of the spatial quality of the villages. The lack of an integrated management plan has been an important factor in the weakness of facilities and

biological imbalance in these villages, and it has further aggravated the region's infrastructural problems, including education, sewage networks, surface water disposal, water supply, and electricity supply. According to (Fig. 1), the population growth rate in Lorestan province has been decreasing, and this statistic indicates an increase in migration. Migration and population decline are two of the most important consequences of unbalanced and limited development, which are examined in the social dimension under indicators such as education, facilities, health, etc.

## Case Studies

### • Sorkhdom Laki Village

There are numerous rural development plans, such as the Hadi plan, the Ministry of Oil plan, the Ministry of Energy plan, and the Awqaf (Endowment and Charity Affair) development plan, being carried out by separate operators. As each operator implements interventions in the villages based on their policies, there is an imbalance between life and rural development. Such plans have often ignored the context of the village and the local people, caused chaos in the structure, and created unbalanced development. According to the statistics about the poverty level in Sorkdem Laki village reported by Khorasani and Mohammadi (2021), it can be seen that relative to Kuhdasht, it can be inferred that the implementation of the Hadi project and infrastructure projects, including the plan of the Ministry of Energy and the passage of gas transmission pipelines through agricultural lands (Fig. 2),

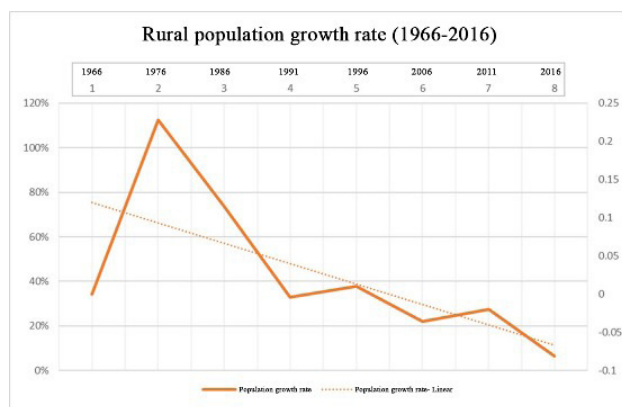


Fig 1. The growth rate of the rural population of Lorestan province based on the population statistics of the Statistics Center of Lorestan province from 1966 to 2016. Source: Author archive.

have harmed the economic prosperity, livelihood, jobs, and life of the people of Sorkhdom Laki Village, leading to the sale of farmers' land, the destruction of agricultural space, limiting access to land, damage to crops, and reduction of the quality of livelihood and educational infrastructure.

### • Abu al-Wafa Village

The multiplicity of rural development plans and different operators are among the basic problems in Abu al-Wafa village. The reason is that the Endowment Administration is in charge of shrine development while the Housing Foundation is in charge of rural affairs, and the structure of plans, this has resulted in selective choices and decisions based on different tastes. Awqaf as the administrator of the development of the shrine in Abu al-Wafa village selectively focuses on the form and geographical area of the shrine and implements development plans to attract tourists and pilgrims (Figs. 3 & 4). The main focus of this type of development is the improvement and expansion of the shrine regardless of the location and economic aspects of the village. This development approach has exclusively focused on religious areas and operates independently of the economic and social needs and characteristics of the village, which has contributed to the mechanization of the village. At first, this development can be a kind of balanced development from a social point of view, but according to Khorasani and Mohammadi's article (2021), the general poverty index situation in Abu al-Wafa village is on a downward trend. This statistic shows



Fig. 2. The passage of gas pipelines through the agricultural lands in the village of Sorkhdom has caused land division and damage to the lifestyles of the villagers. Source: Author archive.



Fig. 3. The aerial map of Abu al-Wafa village and existing social and identity markers. Source: Author based on Google earth.



Fig. 4. The widened main axis of the entrance of Abulofa village leading to the shrine. Source: Author archive.

the implementation of development plans is selective and there is a lack of consistency in their trajectories for achieving economic growth. Although the shrine of Abu al-Wafa plays an important role in the socio-ritual dimensions of the place, its development plan is not included in the rural development plans. Among other village development plans, the Hadi plan has only focused on the physical dimensions, improving the road network and urban structures, and such a difference in focus in the plans has resulted in disjointed and uncoordinated development, leading to a lack of growth and balanced development in this village.

#### • Khosro Abad Village

Khosro Abad village is considered a successful village from an economic point of view due to its pomegranate orchards and fertile agricultural lands compared to the two

investigated villages, which has affected the social dynamics in the rural community. The economic power of the village is linked to pomegranate cultivation, which has provided a source of stable income for its residents. This factor emphasizes the relationship between economic prosperity and social dynamics. According to the data reported by the Iran Statistics Center, this village has a population growth rate of 3%, which indicates a negative rate of migration compared to the other two villages (Iran Statistics Center, 2015). The identity of the village of Khosro Abad, which is rooted in the prosperity of agriculture and horticulture and the cultural-social features of the village, has contributed to the growth of its population and indicates the existence of a level of desirability in the place and identity of the village. It seems that the presence of elements of identity in the village, along with the coherent spatial context, as central places for social interactions, has greatly contributed to the evolution and continuation of the social dynamics of the village because they act not only as physical focal points but also as symbolic elements and character of the village.

#### Evaluation

Development measures have been carried out in the investigated villages to achieve economic progress and improve the quality of the social lives of native people. By measuring indicators such as the level of livelihood, education, immigration, health, culture, etc., which have an impact on the evaluation of the social development of the villages under investigation, it seems that the colonial actions by the upper institutions have hindered economic growth and meeting the social needs of the villagers. Also, by examining the quality and results of the measures taken and their effects on the development of villages, it seems that in cases where social participation was more prominent, the effectiveness of development measures was also greater, and on the contrary, the lack of management integrity and the participation of local people caused the formation of unbalanced development. The gas pipelines in the village of Sorkdom Laki, which are specified in the framework of the National Development Plan, implement mandatory land allocation regulations for the villagers.

This plan requires the transfer of land around the project area, which causes the division of agricultural land. The concern is that agricultural lands are the biggest capital of the villagers, and this incident has caused irreparable damage to the livelihood of the villagers. According to the observations, as a result of the loss of agricultural land and the weakening of the village economy, the amount of benefit from social indicators including education, facilities, and livelihood has also decreased. These factors have resulted in the forced migration of the village residents.

In Abu al-Wafa village, two development plans have been planned and implemented. The endowment plan has targeted the development of the shrine of Abu al-Wafa and the development of ritual tourism, and the Hadi plan is being implemented with a focus on physical reforms in the village. What has been neglected in this matter is the connection and integration of the identity and place of the shrine with the village. Even though the villagers are regular tourists at this pilgrimage site, the village has no benefits from the development of the shrine, and its economic and tourism infrastructures have been separated from the life of the village. Based on field observations and (Fig. 3), the incompatibility of ritual and local development has caused the main axis of the village to be unused, the texture to be disintegrated, and, as a result, the disconnection of the three elements of the Iranian landscape, including Chahartaqi (four arches), fountains, and trees. The education crisis in this village as mentioned in Khorasani and Mohammadi's article (2021) is a sign of the negligence of the dimensions of social development in the development plans. The result of this is the physical dispersion of the village, a schooling crisis, an increase in immigration, an increase in poverty, and unemployment. Even though the Hadi plan has been implemented based on the principles of urban development like any other village, it has been richer and more cohesive in terms of location and social aspects compared to visited villages. One of the distinguishing aspects of this village is the participation of the people and the attachment of the community to the factors and signs of the village's identity. These signs

include the ancient caves and minaret and the traditional mansion called Baba Salam Chartaqui. According to the data on (Figs. 5 & 6), they are defined along an axis, and the intersection of the road with this axis has defined the center and core of the village and has caused the cohesion of the place and the preservation of the community in the village. Therefore, despite the physical and spatial damages inflicted on the village, its mechanization has been protected by maintaining identity and social signs, and this village has more stability and dynamism.

## Conclusion

Examining the case studies shows that the rural development plans of Kuhdasht are unbalanced, and this imbalance cannot lead to integrated development and improvement of the economic level and subsequently to the improvement of the social level. Development plans with emphasis on place and place-based planning help development to be on the right path, and due to the interaction of native people with these plans, development layers grow in a balanced and place-based manner. Balanced does not mean the same plans and the same action for all villages, but refers

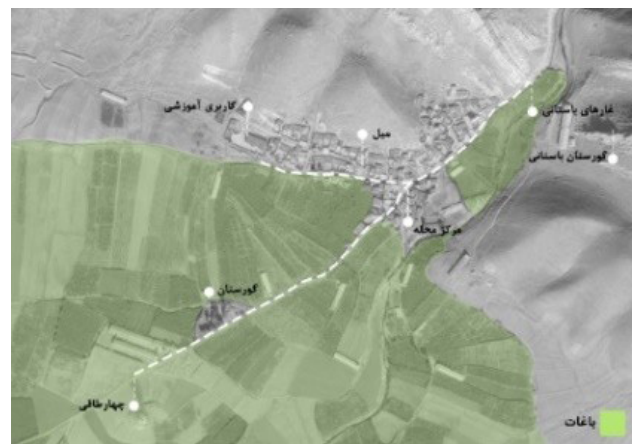


Fig. 5. Aerial map of Khosroabad village and existing identity and social elements. Source: Author archive.



Fig. 6. identity and social elements of Khosroabad village (right to left: Babaslam Fire Temple, neighborhood center, mill). Source: Author archive.

to measuring the capacity and determining the biological damage of each village so that according to the demands and capacities of each place, development plans are planned and implemented in the necessary and neglected dimensions. The results obtained from the research show that the alignment of the programs of upstream institutions with the needs of the local community will lead to balanced and place-based development. Therefore, emphasizing the development of villages according to their existing capacities and meeting the needs of the local community will increase people's interaction with their balanced and place-based development and advancement plans. This approach causes more balance and coordination in rural development and seeks progressive development. Also, this type of development has many advantages and differences compared to centralized and exclusive development methods because it allows villages to play a more active role in determining the fate of their village's development and the main direction of development. The location of the village is considered a common keyword in various village development programs. Therefore, according to the systematic and detailed knowledge of the village, the development plans are moving forward with an emphasis on the capacities and needs of the place. Focusing on the location and having an accurate understanding of the identity characteristics and needs of the villages helps in successful and balanced development. Integrated and systemic management are the basic principles in the realization of place-oriented development and not only help to develop effective and efficient programs but also

respond to the needs and priorities of the local community. This approach allows rural development to continue more effectively and sustainably to improve living conditions in these areas.

### Declaration of No Conflict of Interest

The author declare that she has no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

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