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Original Research Article

Place-Based Tourism Development and Its Relationship with Mining, the Local Community, and Spatial Organization in the City of Sirjan*

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ABSTRACT

Industrial and mining development in resource-based cities often transforms the spatial organization and the historical place identity of those cities. The city of Sirjan, historically a caravan junction with a place-based structure organized around the bazaar axis, entered a new era of sudden population growth from the 1370s SH (Solar Hijri calendar; the 1990s) with the arrival of the Gol Gohar industrial and mining complex. Aiming to explain the role of mining development in the transformation of Sirjan's spatial organization and the demands of its local community, and to offer a framework for place-based tourism planning, this study addresses the question of how place-based development can influence tourism planning.

Data were collected through a combination of library research and field study, including observation and open interviews with citizens and employees of the Gol Gohar complex, during the Nazar Research Center's research trip to Sirjan (1404 SH, i.e., 2025–26).

The findings show that Gohar Park, the most important tourism project of this complex, is alien to the urban context in its climatic, economic, cultural-identity, and semantic dimensions and, despite its large scale, does not respond to the local community's real demand: accessible, public leisure. By contrast, the city's historical intra-urban assets (the bazaar axis, saras, caravanserais, and restored historic buildings) provide a natural foundation for a place-based approach. On this basis, a framework built on four principles (endogeneity, publicness, local community participation, and the strengthening of place identity) is proposed for tourism planning in Sirjan. Realizing this framework, alongside redefining a ritual route based on the bazaar axis, also requires improving citizens' "landscape literacy."

* This article is derived from the research project titled "Place-Based Development: The Interplay of Spatial Organization, Local Community, and Mining," conducted under the supervision of Dr. Seyed Amir Mansouri in December 2025 at the Nazar Research Center for Art, Architecture, and Urbanism.

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Introduction

In recent decades, tourism has changed from a simple leisure activity into a strategic tool for development. An appropriate response to society's needs, drawn from cultural, historical, and indigenous patterns, lays the groundwork for place-based tourism development in the city. In practice, however, by prioritizing the automobile and modern standards, tourism and leisure have become an economic and commodified phenomenon with limited access, one that is out of reach for a large part of the urban population.

Iranian cities in desert regions, such as Isfahan, Kerman, and Semnan, generally took shape around a longitudinal structure based on the bazaar, an element that laid the foundation of the city's spatial organization and in connection with which elements such as the mosque, the square, the bathhouse, and the hosseiniyeh (a congregation hall for Shi'a commemorative rituals) took shape. With the street-building policies of the First Pahlavi period and the expansion of industry and mining in later periods, this spatial structure suffered extensive destruction, and the ground was prepared for the local community's alienation from the urban spatial organization.

Sirjan, too, is a historic city with a prominent position on the north–south as well as the west–east trade axes, as attested by the caravanserais and historic forts around it. Today, however, Sirjan has become a symbol of the industrial and mining city. The growth of mines since the 1370s SH (1990s), especially the Gol Gohar complex, has raised the city's population from about 140,000 to more than 200,000 (Ghazanfarpour, 2014) and has drawn migrants from across the country to the city. This hasty growth pushed urban demands beyond local capacities and exposed the city's spatial organization and place identity to transformation. The question of this study arises from here: have the tourism responses provided for this city (the 400-hectare Gol Gohar tourism complex, 25 kilometers outside the city) been consistent with the city's place-based capacities and the local community's real demands?

Aiming to explain the role of mining development in the transformation of Sirjan's spatial organization and local community, and to provide a framework for place-based tourism planning, this study pursues the following question: What impacts has mining-industrial development had on the spatial organization and the tourism demands of Sirjan's local community, and what requirements does it create for place-based tourism planning in this city? The study's sub-question is: how do the residents and employees of Sirjan perceive the impact of the Gol Gohar complex on the city's spatial organization and its existing leisure spaces?

Research Method

This study was conducted with a qualitative approach and a case-study strategy. Data were collected from two main sources: documentary and library research, and field study. The study's theoretical foundations, including the concepts of development, place and place-based development, and place-based tourism, were developed through library sources and official documents (including population statistics from the Statistical Centre of Iran and the Sirjan Municipality, and reputable domestic websites).

Field data were collected during a multi-day research trip to the city of Sirjan in winter 1404 SH (2025–26). The data-collection tools comprised three methods. First, continuous field observation and visual documentation (photography and drawings) of the city's historical and contemporary elements, including the bazaar axis, abandoned saras, newly built neighborhoods, the Gol Gohar complex, and the Gohar Park complex. Second, analysis of existing documents and population statistics. Third, semi-structured conversations with a purposive sample of 15 people from three groups: employees of the Gol Gohar complex and Gohar Park, and native citizens resident in Sirjan. Interviewees were selected on the criterion of maximum variation so as to cover a diverse range of lived experiences of Sirjan's urban transformations. The main themes of the conversations included patterns of use of leisure spaces, the experience of visiting or not visiting Gohar Park, and perceptions of the city's physical and demographic transformations.

The qualitative data were analyzed through qualitative interpretation with an inductive–deductive reasoning approach. That is, the field findings were read and interpreted in light of the study's theoretical framework, and from the intersection of the two, the proposed place-based tourism framework for Sirjan was derived.

Theoretical Foundations

• Development and place

The first development documents in the world, from the 1960s, were drafted on the basis of purely economic growth, and four decades later the United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000) declared this approach ineffective for comprehensive urban growth (Mafi & Bazzar, 2018). Today, development

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approaches have expanded toward social, cultural, and environmental dimensions (Rafiei Dehaghani, 2026), and Habibi classifies urban development under spatial justice (Habibi, 2009). These social and cultural dimensions of development require an objective setting that cannot be regarded merely as spatial, physical, or geographical, but must be understood as place: a bearer of meaning, identity, and collective memory. On this basis, development is a context-dependent and place-based phenomenon. But this dependence on place first of all requires a precise understanding of what place is, a concept that in the literature of architecture and urbanism is known for its fundamental distinction from space.

Place, unlike abstract and quality-less space, is the result of people's endowing the physical environment with meaning through culture, experience, and social relations (Stedman, 2003; Tuan, 2001; Rapoport, 1982). It is a multifaceted phenomenon (Relph, 1976) that is the product of social values and meanings formed over time (Lefebvre, 1991). Norberg-Schulz regards the components of space as centrality, boundary, territory, enclosure, and the dialectic of inside and outside (Norberg Schulz, 1997, 432; Amiri Pouya et al., 2022). But what turns space into place is precisely the layer of meaning and identity that the local community has added to it over the course of history.

• Place-based development and the challenge of industrialization

Place-based development is a model of development that attends to the capacities of a place and to residents' perception of it (Hosseinzadeh et al., 2024). Unlike general, all-inclusive policies, it takes the cultural, historical, biophysical, and social context of each place as its basis, a context that takes shape from within the local community and at the same time influences it. But this place identity is vulnerable to one particular type of development: industrial and mining development which, with sudden and exogenous growth, disrupts the place's historical proportion.

In development theory, this phenomenon is known as "boomtowns" or "resource-based communities": communities whose growth stems not from a gradual and endogenous process but often from the sudden exploitation of a natural resource (Tsenkova & Youssef, 2014). This disproportion between population and the capacities of the place leads to a decline in social cohesion. Unbridled migration, intense competition for housing, and a shortage of public space transform people's socio-spatial meaning and identity, and the process of hasty urbanization can lead to the destruction of the traditional community and the loss of its security and intimacy (Tönnies, 2001).

• Tourism development and place-based tourism

The response to this crisis, namely restoring social cohesion and place identity in cities undergoing industrial transformation, is one of the main functions of place-based tourism, provided that tourism is not itself an agent that deepens placelessness but a tool for the revival of place.

Tourism, beyond seeing a new physical space, is the experience of the semantic and sensory qualities of a place. Hence "sense of place" has become a central concept in the tourism literature (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). Tourist destinations are dynamic and historical units whose identity is shaped under the influence of various discourses, and the tourism industry's representation of a place may differ from local perceptions of that same place and create conflicts in the development process (Saarinen, 2004). Tourism planning in the modern era has taken shape mainly within an economic and functional logic, one that reduces destinations to "products." Relph calls this process "spatial homogenization" or the "erosion of place," and it ends in the loss of sense of place (Relph, 1976). The result of this approach is spaces that are apparently tourist destinations but are alien to their real context in climatic, historical, cultural, and identity terms, and that turn into placeless spaces (Saarinen, 2004).

In contrast to this approach, in place-based tourism, tourism planning takes shape not from the outside in but from the inside out. The inner capacities of the place are the starting point, and the tourist is not a consumer of space but a participant in an experience that reproduces and strengthens the identity of the place (Lew, 2017). In this approach, the local community is not an object of display but the main agent in the tourism development process (Hosseinzadeh et al., 2024). Therefore, the place identity of a destination defines and names that place and its tourists, and distinguishes it from other destinations and from the surrounding physical and social environment.

The relationship among this study's concepts can be formulated as a logical chain: development is by nature place-based; place is an entity that bears meaning and collective identity; industrial and mining development with exogenous growth disrupts this bond; and place-based tourism is a strategic tool for restoring this bond. On this basis, place-based tourism

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is the operational field of place-based development in the domain of leisure and tourism, and this framework forms the basis for analyzing Sirjan's situation in the Discussion section.

Discussion

• Analysis of sirjan's historical spatial organization (before mining)

To assess the state of tourism in Sirjan and to gauge whether existing interventions are place-based or not, four criteria are derived from this study's theoretical foundations. The first is endogeneity (drawing on the place's historical, cultural, and social capacities rather than on imported patterns). The second is publicness (access for all strata without economic or physical barriers). The third is local community participation (residents' agency in the planning process, not merely their enjoyment of its results). The fourth is the strengthening of place identity (reinforcing the bond among physical form, activity, and meaning, instead of deepening placelessness). These four criteria form the analytical framework of the Discussion section.

As a historic desert city, Sirjan has long been shaped in connection with supra-regional trade networks. But this link with the outside was not in contradiction with place-basedness; it was itself grounded in the city's place-based capacities. Place-basedness does not mean isolation or the absence of connection with the outside. It means that external forces were absorbed, digested, and turned into urban identity through the inner capacities of the place, rather than dissolving that identity. Sirjan was a small city that had once been a transit center for great commercial caravans: caravans that passed through it on the north-to-south route to reach the port, and caravans that passed through it on the west-to-east route. For this reason, two intersecting historical axes can be imagined for this city, which met at prominent points such as the forts.

The arrival of commercial caravans in the city gave rise to the bazaar, where local people sold local products or bought products from other regions. The bazaar was the most important thoroughfare in old cities, and the greatest volume of citizens' movement took place in it (Sultanzade, 2001, 28). The bazaar, as an active space of high commercial and productive dynamism, is essentially considered an urban institution and space. It is the most important urban route, which usually took shape along the main road leading to the city, and for this reason the most important urban elements, spaces, and buildings, such as the city's public square, the congregational mosque, the caravanserais, the madrasa (religious school), the mint, and the like, were located along it (Sultanzade, 2001). In this structure, the city's spatial organization took shape around a living element in which people were active day and night. The spatial organization of Sirjan, too, was formed on the basis of the spatial structure of Sirjan's bazaar, along which are located saras (traditional bazaar courtyards), hosseiniyehs, takiyehs (venues for commemorative rituals), mosques, bathhouses, and caravanserais, and which, like a "string of prayer beads," connects these elements to one another. This structure can be regarded as a historical example of place-based development: a development in which physical form, activity, and meaning took shape in organic proportion to one another and to the place's indigenous capacities (Relph, 1976). The bazaar is the result of this proportion, in which form, activity, and meaning, together with the thermal comfort created against the desert heat, made place in Sirjan, and it is highly influential in shaping the collective identity of citizens in relation to the city (Fig. 1).

Like most desert cities of Iran, Sirjan's structure enjoyed a fixed and meaningful form across different historical periods. The city's development proceeded on the basis of indigenous capacities and their demands, without external agents disturbing this historical-cultural proportion. This inner equilibrium is itself a sign of place-based development, since the city grew not on imposed models but from its own inner capacities and bonds (Hosseinzadeh et al., 2024). This proportion, however, was vulnerable to exogenous and sudden transformations, which began with the arrival of the Gol Gohar mine in the 1370s and later intensified in the 1390s (the 2010s).



Fig. 1. The Sirjan Bazaar. Photo: Heydarizadeh Shali, 2025.

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• Transformation of spatial organization with the arrival of the gol gohar mine

The discovery of precious mines around Sirjan and the development of the Gol Gohar industrial-mining complex plunged the city into a sudden, exogenous period of transformation whose nature contradicts the indigenous model of the past. Industry and mining became the city's primary economic priority, the historical identity and urban form were transformed, an acute need for labor emerged, and with the growing influx of new labor, Sirjan's urban infrastructure lost the capacity to meet the new demands. The city faced a wave of mass migration from across the country. Its population rose from about 12,000 in the 1330s (1950s) to about 47,000 in the 1350s (1970s), was reported at about 140,000 in the 1370s and 185,000 in the 1380s (2000s), and the estimate for the 1400s (2020s) exceeds 370,000 (Ghazanfarpour, 2014) (Fig. 2). This uneven population growth, which consisted mainly of single male labor, had multiple consequences: a gender imbalance in the city's demographic composition, the unplanned expansion of urban areas for the rapid housing of new labor, and pressure on infrastructure that had been designed for a far smaller population. These observations were confirmed in the field visit of winter 1404 SH and in conversations with the city's residents.

As a result of these extensive transformations in the city's spatial structure, malls and large commercial-recreational complexes were built in various parts of the city. In contrast to the indigenous, historical-cultural pattern of the bazaar, these emphasize an elitization of shopping (Fig. 3). This new structure has brought shops to the street frontage, so the bazaar is no longer the axis that organizes the urban system; it has been reduced to the small openings of shops along various streets. A city whose identity took shape from the bazaar axis and its related elements now faces a population that neither knows that axis nor has any bond with it.

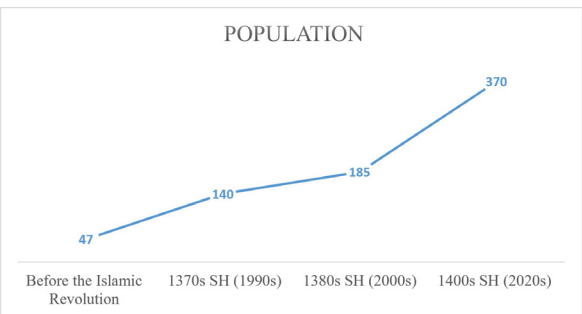

Fig. 2. Population growth rate of the city of Sirjan from before the Revolution to the 1400s SH. Source: authors.

The bazaar, previously described as the "string of prayer beads" of urban elements, is in fact what Relph (1976) calls a "center of meaning": a space in which form, activity, and meaning were interwoven and from which residents' collective identity was nourished. With the marginalization of this axis and its replacement by commercial centers that have no roots in the city's historical-cultural context, what Relph calls "placelessness" has occurred in Sirjan: spaces that have function but no meaning. As a result, the past spatial organization has given way to a mechanical, identity-less, and purely physical order, and there is no longer any sign of active and productive saras in the city (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3. The Ziggurat Commercial Complex: an upscale and luxurious space, yet without crowds, Sirjan. Photo: Heydarizadeh Shali, 2025



Fig. 4. A sara in Sirjan's traditional bazaar, devoid of activity, has become a place of shelter for people with drug addiction. Photo: Heydarizadeh Shali, 2025.

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• Analysis of local community demands

In this study, Sirjan's local community cannot be regarded as a unified whole; it consists of three distinct groups, each with a different relation to the place and to the city's spatial organization. The first is native residents, who have a historical bond with the city's place identity and generally feel the greatest alienation from the new transformations. The second is migrants, who arrived without an initial bond with Sirjan's place identity and generally have immediate and public leisure needs. The third is employees affiliated with the Gol Gohar complex, who have relative access to the complex's exclusive facilities but remain deprived of intra-urban leisure spaces. The field conversations of this study covered all three groups and showed meaningful differences in their perceptions of urban transformations. These differences in perception are themselves a reflection of the massive transformation of the city's underlying, demographic, and identity structure after the discovery of the mines and the arrival of industries. In this new period, with the arrival of industrialists, workers, and engineers, emerging demands arose in the city. These stem not only from the arrival of migrants; they can also be seen as the result of local institutions' abdication of responsibility in the face of the decisions of large industries, which, by prioritizing the logic of production over balanced development, have added the housing of their workforce, as a new demand, to the local capacities. Capacities that were designed for a population of fewer than 140,000 must now respond to the demands of a population of upwards of 370,000 (Ghazanfarpour, 2014). This unbridled increase in urban demands has led to shortages in the city, in housing, leisure spaces, street construction, stores, and cultural spaces, from which Sirjan is not exempt.

Among these shortages, the need for leisure is of great importance because of its direct impact on the mental health of the new society, a role that in the past was met in the bazaars and saras through socio-economic exchanges. Leisure, as a set of voluntary activities of rest, recreation, and personal development (Dumazedier, 1967), is one of the most important functional domains of cities. These spaces are very important for citizens' psychological balance; consequently, citizens' psychological efficiency and productivity are directly related to how effectively the functional set of these spaces performs (Roumiani & Yousefzadeh Sohailabadi, 2024). Today, urban planners and managers in different societies regard this need as the basis for the comprehensive growth of a local community, especially in industrial cities where a high percentage of the population is migrant and alien to the spatial-demographic context of the region. Sirjan, as an industrial city, faces a meaningful gap in attending to emerging leisure needs, a gap that the existing response (Gohar Park) has not only failed to fill but has in effect sent citizens' leisure needs to the wrong address.

The influx of new population into the city has mainly been for work and employment in industrial and mining companies. This volume of new population load led to the local community's alienation from the city's identity-semantic structure, an alienation that has also increased in recent years. This alienation should not be considered an inherent characteristic of the migrant population; it is a direct consequence of the absence of urban integration policies and cultural planning commensurate with this volume of population movement. Since a city's spatial organization takes shape from the collective agreement of its residents and their shared cultural framework (Abarghouei Fard & Mansouri, 2021), the growing alienation of citizens has also affected this spatial organization and led to the expansion of the physical boundary and changes in its edges. This expansion, carried out by urban planners, designers, and municipal managers, led to the creation of new neighborhoods that are neither a continuation of the city's local structure nor have even a minimum of welfare facilities, and that have even been reduced to places of slum living or truck parking (Fig. 5). These imbalances weakened the parameters influencing a city's spatial organization, such as territory, centrality, structure, and small wholes (Mansouri, 2020: 49), and disrupted the relationship between the local community and the city's spatial organization. The neighborhoods of Makiabad, Abadeh, Deh Yadegar, and Bagh-e Bamid are examples of this: neighborhoods that have grown as a result of the population pressure caused by the Gol Gohar complex but in which no trace of Sirjan's identity and its people can be seen (Fig. 6).

The disruption of the relationship between two important members of the city's elements in Sirjan, together with the mine as the largest driver of the city's physical development, led to unbalanced development that is neither consistent with citizens' demands nor related to the city's real capacities. Citizens' mental connection with the elements and components of the city's spatial organization has been severed, and instead of a place that bears meaning, form, and activity, the city has become a set of mutually unrelated

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Fig. 5. Bagh-e Bamid neighborhood, Sirjan. Photo: Fatemeh Parsafar, 2025.



Fig. 6. Abadeh neighborhood, Sirjan. Photo: Ayda Rasoulzadeh, 2025.

components, as a result of ignoring the cultural, social, and place-based contexts in which development takes shape (Khorramrouei & Mahan, 2026). Although comprehensive development has always been emphasized by urban officials and by the Gol Gohar complex, in practice this urban development has resulted in the construction of a football stadium, luxury hotels, and luxury tourism venues. It is development in the name of Sirjan's citizens but for the benefit of guests and of strata connected with the Gol Gohar complex, and as a result it has divided the city into two contrasting zones, traditional and contemporary (Fig. 7). Instead of adopting an interpretive and holistic approach that, by moving away from imported prescriptions of development, would allow indigenous and sustainable patterns to take shape (Khorramrouei & Mahan, 2026), such an approach has led to urban dissatisfaction and to the severing of residents' semantic connection with the city.

• A Critique of gohar park as a non-place-based response

The increase in the activities of the Gol Gohar industrial and mining complex can be considered the most important factor in the excessive growth

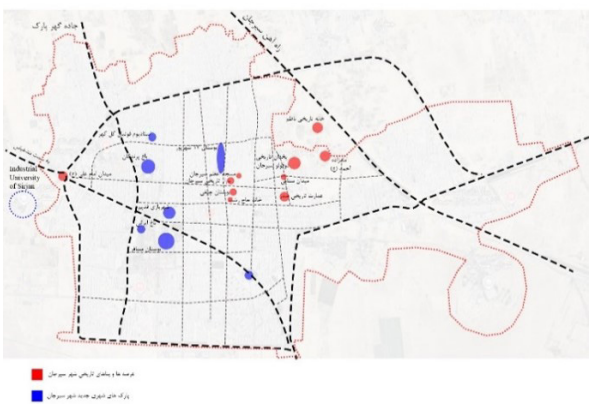

Fig. 7. Historic and new precincts and buildings in the city of Sirjan. Source: authors, 2025.

of Sirjan's population. This considerable population increase led the Gol Gohar complex, in reaction to the pressure of housing and organizing its workforce, to enter the domain of urban management and planning and to carry out a variety of projects in Sirjan, from urban and extra-urban parks to the restoration of historic buildings. The construction of Gohar Park, the creation of the Chapaghi Windcatchers Park, and the restoration of Haj Rashid House and the historic and cultural Sadr Mansion have been among the most important activities of the Gol Gohar complex in Sirjan, carried out to promote tourism in the city (Fig. 8–10).

But these projects should not be placed in a single category. The restoration of Haj Rashid House and Sadr Mansion, owing to their intra-urban location and their connection with Sirjan's historic fabric, can be evaluated in line with the logic of place-based development, although they have been left on the margins of the complex's larger-scale actions. By contrast, the Chapaghi Windcatchers Park, although built within the historic urban fabric and on the edge of one of the most distinctive existing windcatchers, was built without regard to context, culture, history, and climate, with foreign plants, non-indigenous materials, and metal furniture (Fig. 11). Gohar Park, too, was formed outside the city's living fabric and without connection to its historical-identity axis (Fig. 12-13). Hence, these two projects are examples of external and imported intervention in the city's spatial organization.

Gohar Park is an example of a policy of manufacturing superlatives in Sirjan: the largest park in the Middle East, the tallest artificial waterfall, the largest artificial lake in the heart of the desert, and the best wildlife park. Urban managers, too, have hidden behind these claims so that the weaknesses of their urban management and planning are not seen. The park's location, with an area of approximately 400 hectares

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Fig. 8. The historic ice house (yakhdan) of Sirja. photo: Setare Nasirifar, 2025.


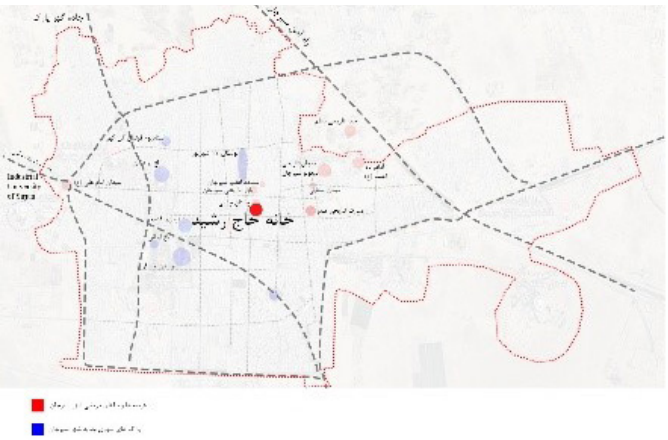

Fig. 9. Haj Rashid House in Sirjan. Source: authors, Photo: Heydarizadeh Shali, 2025.


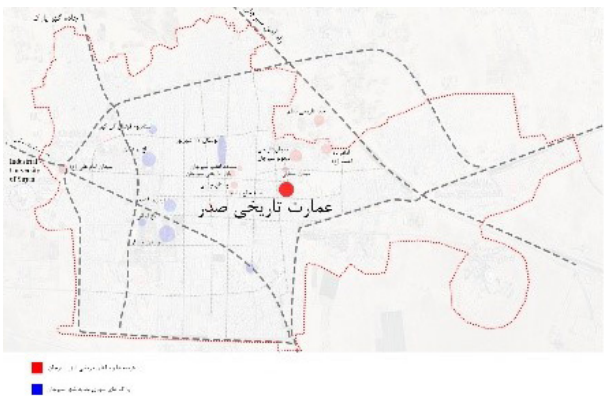

Fig. 10. The historic Sadr Mansion in Sirjan. Source: authors, Photo: Heydarizadeh Shali, 2025.


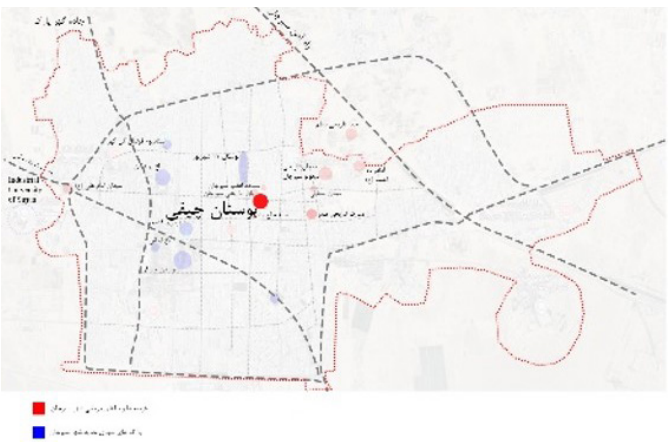

Fig. 11. Chapaghi Park, Sirjan. Source: authors, Photo: Heydarizadeh Shali, 2025.

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Fig. 12. The location of the city of Sirjan, Gohar Park, and the Gol Gohar complex. Source: authors, 2025.

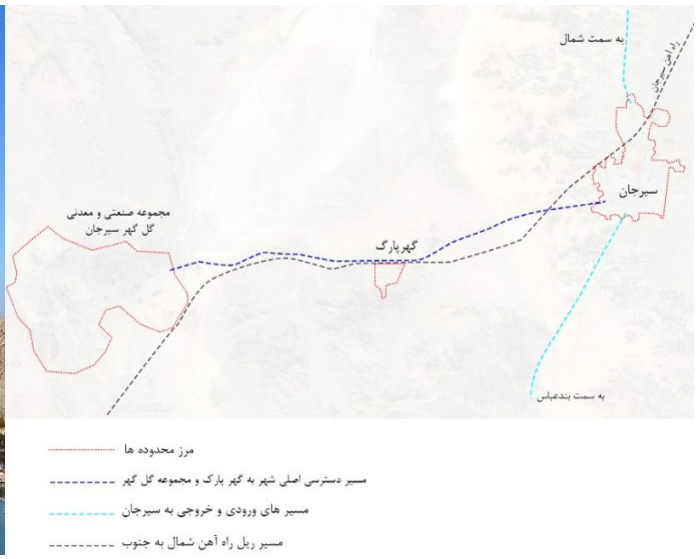

Fig. 13. The distant position of the city of Sirjan relative to Gohar Park. Photo: Heydarizadeh Shali, 2025.

in the mountainous and desert region outside the city, has made daily access to it difficult for citizens, and the high entrance fee, together with the obligation to use the complex's internal services, imposes a heavy financial burden on Sirjani families. The result is that an out-of-scale complex with poor access is reduced to a showcase of promotional labels rather than being a real setting for meeting citizens' leisure needs. The interviews conducted with mine employees and with citizens during the Nazar Research Center's research trip to Sirjan (1404 SH) showed that the Gol Gohar complex has allocated exclusive discount vouchers to encourage its employees to visit Gohar Park. Nevertheless, the low visitation rate has meant that the complex is open to visitors only on the last three days of the week. Sirjan is a working-class city in which most citizens have middle-level incomes. For this reason, the cost of visiting Gohar Park becomes, for many families, a considerable item in the annual budget, a reason that most local interviewees cited for their reluctance to visit the complex. This financial pressure, together with the complex's physical and identity-related detachment from the city's context, has prevented a meaningful bond from forming between Gohar Park and the collective memory of residents, so that going out for leisure in Sirjan, instead of being a place-based experience, has become a commodified, industrial process that is inaccessible to all.

• Proposed framework for place-based tourism in sirjan

As stated in the Discussion section, Sirjan is a historic city with a distinct spatial organization. Place-based tourism must start from capacities that, unlike the Gohar Park approach, are not an external pattern unrelated to Sirjan's context. The historic bazaar axis of Sirjan, previously described as the "string of prayer beads" of urban elements, is the first and most important capacity of this framework. Within this framework, the saras, hosseiniyehs, takiyehs, mosques, bathhouses, and caravanserais around it, although in a state of decline, still physically remain and can be revived (Fig. 14–15). The caravanserais outside the city and the historic forts around Sirjan, as remnants of the north–south and west–east historic axes, are the second capacity and can be redefined in the form of caravan tourism routes (Fig. 16). In addition, it is proposed that a ritual route, beginning at Haj Rashid House, passing the entrance portal of



Fig. 14. An abandoned fort beside Imamzadeh Ali, Sirjan. Photo: Heydarizadeh Shali, 2025.

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Fig. 15. Ritual elements along Sirjan's local access axis. Photo: Heydarizadeh Shali, 2025.



Fig. 16. The entrance of the Sirjan Bazaar. Photo: Heydarizadeh Shali, 2025.

the historic bazaar, and finally reaching Imamzadeh Ahmad, along the existing hosseiniyehs, takiyehs, and mosques (Fig. 17), be defined as one of the strategic capacities of this framework. This route relies on the city's ritual capacities, especially in Muharram, Safar, Ramadan, and festivals, and combines the tourism function with the preservation of citizens' collective memory. All of these capacities are within the city's historic fabric or in direct connection with it, and they provide a natural foundation for the "inside-out" approach (Lew, 2017) in place-based tourism.

As shown in the analysis of the local community's demands, the main demand of Sirjan's population is public and accessible leisure, not access to a luxurious and costly complex outside the city (Fig. 18). Any proposed framework must start from the point that leisure should be part of everyday urban life, so that it can be used on foot, without the need for a private vehicle or a heavy entrance fee. On this basis, the following four principles are put forward as the proposed framework for place-based tourism planning in Sirjan.

Endogeneity: Planning must draw on the city's existing historical-cultural, social, and economic capacities, not on imported patterns that are alien to Sirjan's indigenous identity. This endogeneity has three dimensions: the physical dimension (the choice of materials, plant species, and a design language compatible with the climate and indigenous identity); the social dimension (redefining leisure activities from the rituals, events, and living patterns of the local community, rather than imposing external recreational models); and the economic dimension (creating an economic value chain for local businesses through tourism, rather than concentrating economic benefits in the hands of one large complex). The experience of the Chapaghi Windcatchers Park warns that endogeneity is not limited merely to location.

Publicness: The proposed tourism arenas must be accessible, without economic or physical barriers, to all strata of the city, native and migrant, unlike the current pattern, which has become a limited commodity for affluent strata or those connected to the Gol Gohar complex.

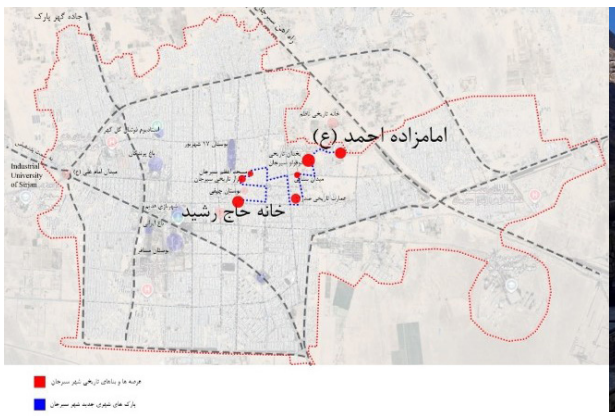

Fig. 17. The ritual axis in the traditional fabric of Sirjan. Source: authors, 2025.



Fig. 18. A recreational building in Gohar Park with imported and luxurious architecture. Photo: Heydarizadeh Shali, 2025.

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Local community participation in planning. In the place-based approach, the local community is not an object of display but the main agent in the tourism development process (Hosseinzadeh et al., 2024). This is a direct reaction to the current pattern, in which decision-making about the city's tourism arenas has been carried out without citizens' participation and solely by upstream complexes such as Gol Gohar and by urban management. This is so even though urban officials describe public participation as a necessity for urban growth and development. It requires the improvement of landscape literacy, which Spirn (1998) considers necessary for increasing citizens' involvement in shaping the urban structure.

Strengthening place identity rather than destroying it: Every proposed tourism intervention must aim at rebuilding the same bond among physical form, activity, and meaning that Relph (1976) regards as the foundation of place formation, and not at deepening the "placelessness" that has occurred in Sirjan with the arrival of imported, identity-less commercial centers such as Gohar Park. The Ziggurat complex (Fig. 2) is another example of this same imported pattern in the city.

Conclusion

This study shows that place-based development can guide tourism planning only when it draws on the inner capacities of the city and at the same time responds to the real needs of today's population. Before the arrival of industry, Sirjan was a practical example of this model: an organic bond among physical form, activity, and meaning that was organized by the bazaar axis. The arrival of the Gol Gohar complex from the 1370s SH disrupted this proportion. Rapid population growth transformed the city's spatial organization and turned neighborhoods such as Makiabad and Bagh-e Bamid, which have no bond with the city's identity, into dilapidated and unsafe zones.

In reaction to this very population pressure, the Gol Gohar complex entered urban management and presented Gohar Park as the solution. But the field data showed this response to be ineffective. The high costs of access, the great distance from the city, and the alienation from Sirjan's historical-identity context have not stimulated visitation, and the complex is closed on most days of the week. The findings of this study show that Gohar Park, in the dimensions examined, falls short of some principles of place-based tourism and exhibits features of the commodified-industrial approach.

The proposed framework of this study, however, does not mean a return to the past; it means the creative use of historical capacities to respond to today's needs. Sirjan today, with a population many times larger and a heterogeneous composition of natives, migrants, and industrial employees, has diverse and urgent leisure needs, none of which is answered by building a luxury complex outside the city. The historic bazaar axis, the saras, the caravanserais, and the proposed ritual route are capacities that, through revival and functional redefinition, can become a public, accessible, and identity-giving space for this present-day population, not as museums of the past but as a living setting for everyday urban life. This is the difference between "place revival" and "museum-style conservation."

On this basis, the proposed framework, in its four principles of endogeneity, publicness, local community participation, and the strengthening of place identity, outlines the practical path of this redefinition. Realizing this framework would, on the one hand, increase the time tourists spend in the city and, on the other, bring greater urban livability, and it would finally lead to an improvement in citizens' literacy in reading and understanding place. With an interpretive and holistic view of the concept of development, this study shows that repairing the damage caused by hasty industrial growth cannot be compensated for by building other large-scale complexes. It must instead be sought in redefining the relationship among the local community, the spatial organization, and that community's awareness of its rights in relation to place. In this sense, Sirjan can be a model for rethinking tourism in other industrial and resource-based cities of Iran.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there was no conflict for them in conducting this research.

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