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Original Research Article

The Impact of Laws and Development Programs on the City and Port of Imam Khomeini from the Qajar Era to the Present*

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a comparative analysis of twenty national, regional, and sub-provincial planning documents related to the development of Imam Khomeini Port in Khuzestan Province, Iran. It investigates the structural and scalar disjunctions within the policymaking framework governing the development of the port and its adjacent urban area. The findings reveal that national-level policies predominantly adopt a macro-scale, upstream documents perspective, framing the port as a strategic infrastructure within international transport and economic networks while disregarding the role and needs of the local community, particularly the city of Sarbandar. Regional documents follow a top-down development model and remain detached from the socio-spatial realities of local populations. At the sub-provincial level, urban policies are mostly disconnected from port-related processes, further exacerbating functional and spatial fragmentation between the city and the port. Spatial analysis of Sarbandar demonstrates that it has not evolved as a coherent port city but rather as a dependent, peripheral settlement primarily serving as a residential base for port workers. While the port has experienced significant national and international growth, the city has faced marginalization and socio-economic deprivation creating a stark developmental disparity between the two adjacent spatial systems. Given the scalar tensions in the development trajectories of the port and the city, how can the role of Sarbandar be redefined within an integrated port development framework? The article concludes that continuing this disjointed development model without a fundamental revision of spatial policies, institutional mechanisms, and community engagement will not only deepen regional inequalities but also further marginalize local capacities. Achieving spatial justice and institutional coherence is therefore identified as a strategic necessity for sustainable port development.

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Introduction

Khuzestan has been one of the most significant provinces of Iran, both before and after the advent of Islam. Its distinctive geographical position over the centuries has led to the migration of diverse ethnic groups into the region. Owing to its strategic location, abundant natural resources, and geographical conditions, Khuzestan became a favorable settlement area for various communities throughout history and simultaneously served as a passageway for the transportation of merchants' goods as well as a route for the movement of ordinary people. Roads have historically played an extraordinary role in the expansion and development of this region; however, the lack of sustained attention from the central government perpetuated deprivation. The construction of roads was primarily motivated by the need to access distant parts of the country, which in turn facilitated the expansion of commerce, the transport of goods, and cultural interactions (Fig. 1). Among the two categories of land and water routes, Khuzestan's waterways—owing to the existence of abundant and navigable rivers—have held particular significance since the earliest periods (Kasravi, 1977, 226–227).

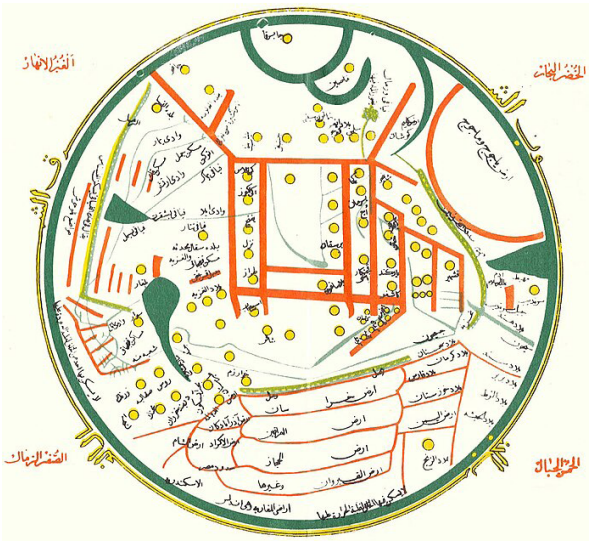


Fig. 1. Map of Khuzestan by Mahmud al-Kashgari (11th century), illustrating its strategic position in terms of accessibility and trade relative to neighboring lands. Source: https://short-url.org/1bsUp

"Abdolghaffar Najm-al-Molk," a distinguished Iranian geographer and cartographer during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah, was among the first individuals to study the geography and road construction of Khuzestan, recognizing the significance of infrastructure development in this region. He recommended that roads and communication routes be improved to enable the economic exploitation of the area. He regarded the establishment of primary communication infrastructures and the expansion of agriculture as fundamental bases for Khuzestan's development (Najm-al-Molk, 1962). However, these recommendations were never fully implemented, as the central government's perspective remained largely short-sighted and profit-oriented. Similarly, "Haj Sayyah," an Iranian traveler and writer of the Qajar era, critically emphasized Khuzestan's underdevelopment, describing the region as lacking the essential infrastructures necessary for urbanization and progress (Sayyah, 1981). Like Najm-al-Molk, he identified the shortage of roads and transportation facilities as major obstacles to the province's development and further argued that the absence of security and order prevented investment and economic growth in the region. Beyond economic considerations and transport infrastructures, the political perception of Khuzestan's ports played another crucial role in shaping the trajectory of underdevelopment in the province. Local rulers made great efforts to limit the influence of the central government over the management of this area and obstructed the flow of resources and facilities from the capital to the south. "Sheikh Khazal," the Arab local leader of Khuzestan, was one of the key opponents of state-sponsored infrastructural development in the region and resisted any projects that could strengthen the influence of the Qajar central government (Afshar-Sistani, 1990). With the emergence of oil extraction, attention to Khuzestan grew significantly; nevertheless, this attention was directed exclusively toward exploiting oil for national and international benefit, while the local community remained entirely disregarded.

The history of Shapur Port (today Imam Khomeini Port) dates back to the final years of Mozaffar al-Din Shah Qajar's reign (1313–1324 AH / 1895–1906 CE). At that time, it was known as Khormousa and existed as a remote village inhabited only by a small number of reed-hut-dwelling fishermen. Ibn Battuta also mentioned the maritime and terrestrial activities of this port in his travelogue during the 7th and 8th centuries AH (Battuta, 2020. 200). During the First World War (1914–1918), the port drew the attention of the British government, which deployed forces there to counter the Ottoman Turks. The village represented the closest point of entry against Ottoman troops in Iraq. After the Ottomans retreated from the Arvand Rud (Shatt al-Arab), the British forces withdrew as well, relocating their fleet to the Shatt al-Arab. From the late nineteenth century CE (14th century AH), under Mozaffar al-Din Shah, foreign companies—particularly British enterprises—became increasingly interested in oil exploration in this region, further enhancing the importance of roads and international

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communications in Khuzestan. In the Pahlavi period, after Reza Shah established Iran's southern naval forces, the port once again gained significance, with facilities such as customs offices and other administrative institutions being established there (Mirian, 1973, 284).

From the early fourteenth century SH (20th century CE), with the emergence of Iran's oil-based economy, the functions of ports and islands were transformed, and Iranian ports either developed or were newly established with petroleum-oriented functions. In 1926 (1305 SH), the law authorizing the construction of the Khormousa–Bandar Gaz railway was approved by the parliament, designating Khormousa anchorage as the southern terminus of the railway. A wooden pier was built there for unloading railway construction equipment and, potentially, military weaponry, capable of accommodating a large vessel (Keyhan, 1994). The first port facilities were constructed in 1931 (1310 SH), contemporaneous with the establishment of Bushehr Port and the expansion of Khorramshahr Port. The first wooden jetty of the port was built simultaneously with the ratification of the Ports Regulations by the Iranian State Railways. Between 1938 and 1939 (1317–1318 SH), the pier was expanded to accommodate two oceangoing vessels. This pier had two docks and was regarded as part of the railway facilities (Iranshahr, 1964, 1487). During the Second World War, after occupying the port, the Allies constructed another pier. Throughout this period of occupation, the port was utilized primarily for transferring military and communication supplies from southern to northern Iran, and no developmental expansion of the port or its infrastructure took place. This indicates that even during such critical historical junctures, the port was regarded merely as a military and instrumental site, rather than as a locus for long-term development.

Following the victory of the Islamic Revolution (February 11, 1979), the withdrawal of Japanese contractors, and subsequently during the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988), all construction operations were suspended. This halt significantly set back the developmental trajectory of the port for several years and further deepened the deprivation of the region. With the outbreak of the Revolution and the onset of the war, Khuzestan, as the frontline of the conflict, suffered extensive damage: numerous infrastructures—including refineries, bridges, roads, and government buildings—were destroyed. After the war, the government launched large-scale reconstruction programs in Khuzestan, which included the rehabilitation of war-torn areas and the restoration of oil and industrial infrastructures (Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1986, 31).

During the 1990s and 2000s, the government continued investing in oil- and gas-related industries and in the establishment of industrial zones in Khuzestan. The expansion of various phases of the Abadan refineries and the construction of petrochemical projects in Mahshahr were among the most significant initiatives of this period. Imam Khomeini Port (formerly Shapur Port) was connected to the national power grid, and its drinking water was supplied through pipelines from Mahshahr Port. Meanwhile, the city of Sarbandar continued to face shortages in basic public services. The Imam Khomeini Port Completion Plan—aimed at enhancing loading and unloading capacity—comprised five subprojects: completion of the railway, roads, yards, ancillary buildings, and warehouses; procurement and installation of land-based, marine, and telecommunication equipment; completion of docks; reconstruction of war-damaged port facilities, including docks and warehouses at Khormousa; and settlement of financial commitments from finalized projects (Ports and Maritime Organization, 1995, 59–60). Given the adjacency of the port and the city, and their relation to regional values, this study questions the proportions and balance of development between them: Within the framework of scalar contradictions posed for the development of the city and the port, how can the actual role of Sarbandar be redefined in the port development model?

Research Method

Tracing the trajectory of development in Imam Khomeini Port and the city of Sarbandar necessitates a systematic re-examination of ratified planning documents. It also requires a comparative analysis of the provisions and directives articulated within them across common themes. This process involves interpreting historical accounts alongside development documents to explore the rationale and mechanisms underlying the formation of Imam Khomeini Port's nucleus. Reports were analyzed in a unified format under the overarching theme of port development, allowing for a structured and scholarly comparison of the provisions within each approved

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document. The outcome of this interpretive reading was the production of a systematic inventory and tabulated classification of themes, regulatory directives, and the identification of neglected areas in prior studies.

This research is grounded in twenty-one upstream documents, including: fourteen national-level documents in two categories (country-wide and maritime), three regional-level documents, and four local-level documents, spanning three historical periods—Qajar, Pahlavi, and contemporary (Fig. 2).

• Analysis of National Documents focuses on defining macro-level policies that guide the orientation of port development programs. The provisions of national documents, by emphasizing state-wide development policies and visions, play a significant role in anchoring key governmental programs and in redefining the frameworks for port development.

• Analysis of Regional Documents relies on national programs to assign spatial value in achieving effective port development. Their mission lies in validating both the spatial and functional dimensions of planning. Regional documents are critical for site selection, envisioning regional futures, and determining the locational value of projects in alignment with higher-level (upstream documents) objectives.

• Analysis of Local Documents interprets port and urban development programs based on the dual reference of national and regional frameworks. As the operational centers of planning, local documents reflect regional spatial values while responding to national macro-visions. These documents, given their reliance on policy orientations and development visions articulated at national, international, and regional levels, as well as the designation of strategic locations for implementing national objectives, provide concrete spatial programming for designated areas.

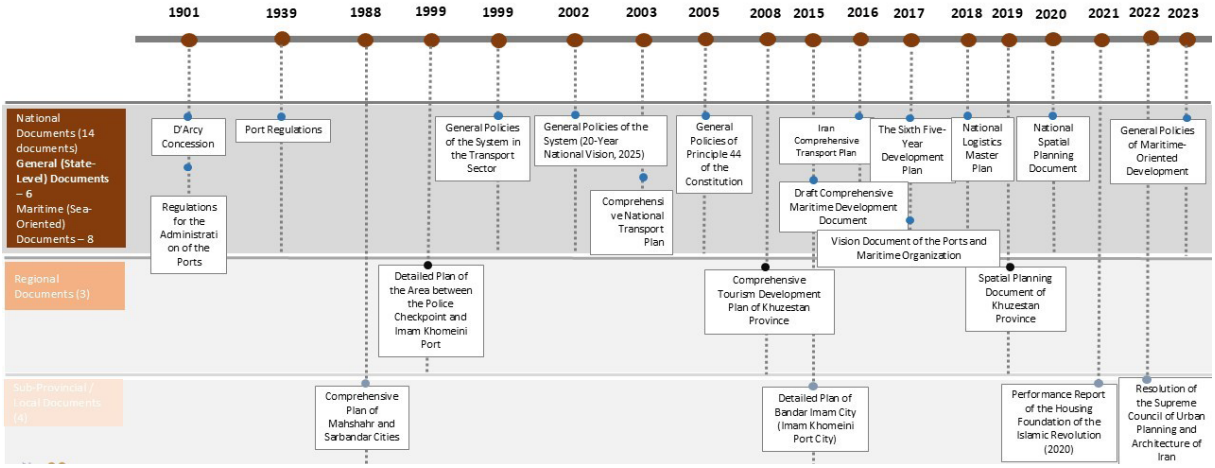


Fig. 2. Twenty-one upstream documents planning documents at the national, regional, and local levels in the field of port development, arranged chronologically by year of ratification. Source: Authors.

Qajar Era: Strategic Position as a Driver of Underdevelopment

During the Qajar period, two national-level documents were ratified in 1901 (1280 SH), one at the state level and the other at the maritime level. The D'Arcy Concession was approved for oil exploration, granting Iran a sixty-year framework shaped largely by political and economic considerations. In the same year, with the expansion of national communications with other countries and the rising importance of maritime transport, the Regulations for the Administration of the Ports of the Persian Gulf were enacted to govern maritime activities. From the late nineteenth century CE (14th century AH), under Mozaffar al-Din Shah, foreign companies—particularly British enterprises—expressed keen interest in oil exploration in the Mahshahr region. These activities intensified with the granting of oil concessions, known as the D'Arcy Concession, to William Knox D'Arcy in the early twentieth century. In 1901, Mozaffar al-Din Shah formally granted D'Arcy the rights to explore and extract oil. After seven years of exploration, in 1908, the D'Arcy Oil Company successfully discovered oil in the Masjed Soleyman region (Maleki, 1950, 9).

In line with these developments, and under the growing influence of the British and Russians in southern Iran, railway routes and road expansion were prioritized to support north–south connectivity and petroleum exploitation. Khormousa Port, later renamed Shapur Port during the Pahlavi era, emerged as one of the principal sites targeted by such policies for the advancement of

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maritime and railway transport (Lasani, 1978). For the first time in the 13th century AH, the Qajars also conceived of an organization called the Administration of the Ports of Fars, which, adopting an economic perspective and a civilian orientation, explicitly managed the affairs of the Persian Gulf's ports and islands.

A manuscript preserved in the National Library of Iran (No. 18476), entitled Regulations for the Administration of the Ports of the Persian Gulf (1319 AH / 1901 CE; 1280 SH), strongly emphasizes the importance and value of southern Iran's transport routes. The document states:

"Of one hundred parts, ninety parts of the southern routes of Iran pass through the gateway of the Persian Gulf; and even today, you can see that warships from most nations and foreign lands arrive at the ports of the Persian Gulf for exploration, while commercial vessels come for trade. Nearly all forms of wealth that may enter Iranian territory and benefit Iranians pass through this route; and likewise, any harm or damage that the Iranian state might suffer also originates from this very route and the Gulf."

Through an analytical examination of both documents, alongside the historical and political propositions regarding the development of Khuzestan during the Qajar era, a strong emphasis on the significance of trade and transportation becomes evident. The region was embedded within a network of power relations at the local, national, and international levels—often conflicting—wherein key actors perceived Khuzestan's development cycle as running counter to their own interests. Consequently, Khuzestan's developmental capacities were largely ignored, and planning trajectories prioritized national and international agendas at the expense of the local community.

The absence of communication and agricultural infrastructures, coupled with the exploitation of oil resources and the presence of colonial powers seeking to derive political and economic benefits from Iran, stand out as the most critical factors contributing to Khuzestan's underdevelopment during the Qajar period (Fig. 3).

Pahlavi Era: The Beginning of Shapur Port's Development

During the Pahlavi period, as in the preceding era, the importance and value of transport routes in this region were strongly emphasized. In this period, several initiatives and measures concerning ports and the development of road networks were undertaken, including the implementation of plans to connect Iran's southern and northern ports by railway, as well as the establishment of new harbors in both the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. In this way, the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf were effectively linked through a combined railway and highway system, giving rise to what was described as a "new transportation corridor by rail and road." Gradually, the ports of Khuzestan emerged as the most important gateways for imports and exports. Accordingly, on February 4, 1936 (15 Bahman 1314 SH), the General Department of Ports was established under the Ministry of Roads and Highways (Yektayi, 1976, 191–192). Although this institutional reform elevated the national standing of the port, it yielded little benefit for surrounding settlements, which instead faced mounting demographic pressures and persistent shortages in public services.

With the establishment of this new entity within the Ministry of Roads, the absence of a legal framework for the execution of its responsibilities came under scrutiny. A commission was convened at the Ministry of Roads and Highways in late 1936 (1315 SH) to draft port regulations. After revisions and the incorporation of comments from various authorities, the first Port Regulations of Iran—comprising 12 chapters and 64 articles—was ultimately approved by the government on January 14, 1939 (24 Dey 1317 SH) and subsequently promulgated to all Iranian ports (Vosoughi, 2018, 11–13) (Fig. 4). methods, which could adversely affect the uniformity of the results and their comparability. This inconsistency in implementation could pose a challenge to establishing uniform standards for the framework's application, potentially limiting the universal applicability of the obtained results. According to a report published in Ettela'at newspaper (1939 [1317 SH], Year 3, No. 617), it was stipulated that in ports where the Ministry of Roads did not have a direct representative, the General Customs Administration would act on behalf of the Ministry in implementing the regulations. These regulations were designed exclusively for the management of cargo entry and exit and maritime affairs, and no executive

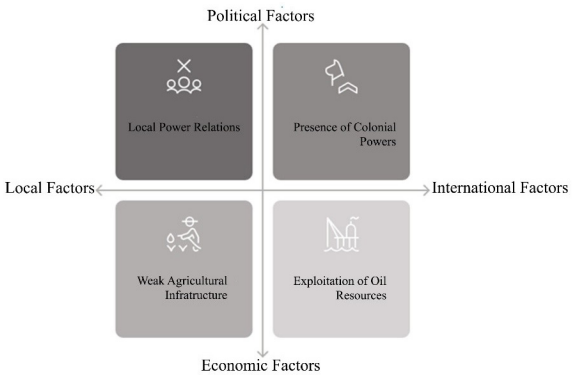


Fig 3. The factors contributing to Khuzestan's underdevelopment during the Qajar period can be categorized into four main dimensions: political, economic, international, and local. Source: Authors.

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Fig. 4. Ratification of the first Port Regulations at the Ministry of Roads in 1939 (1317 SH) and its promulgation to Iranian ports. Source: Yektayi, 1976.

responsibility for the implementation of development projects or the construction of docks was delegated to this organization. Based on the provisions of the regulations, despite the ongoing activities and expansion of the ports, the surrounding towns and villages experienced no significant growth in terms of social conditions, welfare infrastructure, or economic development. According to the regulations, Shapur Port was placed under the supervision of the Customs Administration and the State Railways. This is evidenced in document No. 60268-240 of the National Archives and Library of Iran, in a letter from the foreign advisor Pedersen of the Ministry of Finance to Mr. Hezhir, then Minister of Finance, dated October 14, 1946 (22 Mehr 1325 SH). In part of this letter, Mr. Pedersen refers to Shapur Port's difficulties regarding customs clearance, particularly the challenges of transporting goods, and calls for the development of communication infrastructures and the facilitation of customs clearance at the port.

During the Second Pahlavi era, following the nationalization of the oil industry in 1953 (1332 SH), renewed attention was directed to the expansion of the port. Existing docks were renovated, and the western pier was extended. From 1955 (1334 SH), a port development plan was launched to increase capacity and accelerate cargo handling. However, the natural conditions of the port were not suitable for expansion or for the construction of residential buildings for staff and workers. Consequently, in Sarbandar Station—located twelve kilometers north of the port—an area was designated for the relocation of residents and governmental offices, and plans were prepared for its layout (ibid.: 1488). Sarbandar Station was connected to Shapur Port via a main railway line as well as a major roadway, and to Mahshahr Port through another main road (Ports and Maritime Organization, 1995,15–32). The advancement and expansion of the port accelerated with the construction of a large petrochemical complex east of Sarbandar. The first phase of the Razi Petrochemical Complex (formerly Shapur Chemical) came into operation in 1970 (1349 SH). The agreement for this complex was signed and exchanged in 1970 between the National Petrochemical Company of Iran and Mitsui of Japan, and the joint venture contract was ratified by both parliamentary chambers (the Majles and the Senate) in (1972) (1351 SH) (ibid.). Following the ratification of this agreement, the Japanese company stationed its personnel within a designated area at Sarbandar Station, known as Camp B. The formation of Sarbandar, grounded in labor settlement, thus established a dependent and one-dimensional identity for the city (Fig. 5).

This period witnessed extensive initiatives in the development of transportation networks and ports, which led to the connection of Iran's southern and northern ports as well as the establishment of new harbors in the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. The establishment of the General Department of Ports and the ratification of the first Port Regulations stand out as some of the most significant measures of this era.

During the Pahlavi period, no new national or maritime documents were ratified. Most activities took place at the level of thematic and site-specific programs, which were delegated either to the Ministry of Roads and Highways or to the Railway Administration of the port for infrastructure and transportation development. The trajectory of port development in the Pahlavi era can be interpreted in three stages: 1. Reza Shah's Era (1926–1939 / 1305–1317 SH): This stage involved the expansion of ports and the ratification of the Port Regulations, which facilitated the development of port and transport infrastructures, particularly railways. Nevertheless, this trajectory remained devoid of planning for social services and the livability of adjacent cities. 2. Second World War and the Nationalization of the Oil Industry (1939–1950 / 1318–1329 SH): This stage slowed the pace of port development. During this period, the functions of ports were primarily military and communicational, and their political significance was paramount. As a result, ports were perceived more as instruments of geopolitics than as opportunities for urban and human development. 3. Mohammad Reza Shah's Era after 1953 (1332 SH): Compared to the previous two stages, this period was characterized by greater vitality and pace in development, with a focus on fundamental port-related initiatives. The expansion of docks and the growth of trade and commercial activities based on oil, particularly in Shapur Port, exemplify the prosperity of this era. Overall, while the Pahlavi period placed considerable emphasis on ports

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and infrastructural development, local communities continued to face persistent social and economic challenges. It appears that these difficulties endured in development policies after the Islamic Revolution as well, underscoring the need for more comprehensive reforms in cultural and social dimensions (Fig. 6).

Contemporary Era: Port Development Adjacent to Sarbandar's Underdevelopment

The trajectory of development in Imam Khomeini Port and the city of Sarbandar in the contemporary period, based on nineteen upstream documents, is examined at three levels: national, regional, and local. These documents include eleven national-level, three regional-level, and four local-level plans.

• National Documents

National vision documents, as the most important development frameworks of the country, define the overarching policies of the system. Their orientations, together with the general policies of the state, guide the five-year development programs over the vision period, serving as upstream documents and references for the preparation of annual programs and legislative bills. These documents establish strategic programs aimed at comprehensive advancement across all domains, including economic, industrial, cultural, political, and residential development.

They can be analyzed in two broad dimensions. One-dimensional outlines coordinated programs for the entire country, binding across all territories without spatial limitation. The other identifies strategic national outlooks—such as petroleum industries and the maritime economy—that specify particular strategic locations. Within these documents, Iranian ports are highlighted as key elements in the country's twenty-year development vision. Consequently, part of the general policies of the system in other sectors, including transportation, is also defined in relation to these ports.

According to the documents examined in the historical trajectory of Imam Khomeini Port, the national-level D'Arcy Concession and the maritime-level Regulations for the Administration of the Ports and Port Regulations underscored the importance of developing transport routes, port networks, and national and international trade from south to north.

In the period after the Islamic Revolution, while maintaining the previous development policies, the country's macro-policies concerning ports were articulated in eleven national documents—three at the national level and eight at the maritime level. In 2000 (1379 SH), the General Policies of the System in the Transport Sector were promulgated, comprising five principal policies: 1. Establishing a comprehensive transport system and regulating the share of its subsectors, prioritizing rail transport while considering economic, security, energy consumption, infrastructural balance, and environmental concerns. 2. Increasing efficiency to the highest level through advances in and improvements to transport methods, management, human resources, and information systems. 3. eveloping and reforming the transport network with a systemic approach to corridor development, while taking into account defense–security considerations, national profitability, and the country's transit position. 4. Creating conditions for attracting domestic and foreign investments, encouraging public participation, and expanding insurance coverage across all activities in this sector. 5. Securing a larger share of the international transport market.

In alignment with the country's transport and economic policies, the General Policies of the System and the Twenty-Year National Vision Plan were ratified by the Expediency Discernment Council and promulgated by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution on November 3, 2003 (12 Aban 1382 SH). A copy of this decree and the related resolution of the Expediency Council was published in the Official Gazette of the Islamic Republic of Iran, No. 851213-9720/ḥ, on December 6, 2006 (15 Azar 1385 SH). This resolution included the General Policies of Economic Security, which emphasized support for value-added creation, investment, and entrepreneurship through legal mechanisms. Its ultimate aim was to ensure public welfare, stimulate economic growth, and provide a foundation for economic justice and poverty eradication in the country. The General Policies of the Transport Sector were also defined to create a comprehensive transport system and regulate the shares of its subsectors, with priority given to rail transport. Most recently, in 2023 (1402 SH), the General Policies of Maritime-Oriented Development were issued as the twenty-first upstream document. This policy seeks to maximize the utilization of seas and oceans for the development of Imam Khomeini Port, particularly in the fields of transport and maritime industries (Majles Research Center, 2023).

In the national documents, ports are identified as one of the strategic target locations in the country for the realization of economic and transport policies. Based on the strategic position of ports within the national framework and in line with the General Policies of

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(A) (B)

Fig. 5. A) Coastal wooden huts on the margins of Shapur Port (Imam Khomeini Port), serving as housing for petrochemical workers in 1962 (1341 SH). B) Expansion of Shapur Port, 1962 (1341 SH). Source: https://biglove92.blogfa.com/post/40.

the System, the Comprehensive Transport Plan was ratified in (2003) (1382 SH), followed by the third Comprehensive Commercial Ports Plan in (2004) (1383 SH). In the Comprehensive Commercial Ports Plan of Iran (2004) (1383 SH), twelve ports—including Imam Khomeini Port—were designated as principal ports. Requirements such as the need for an integrated port planning strategy, the necessity of more effective utilization of the potential and actual capacities of commercial ports, the optimal use of modern port equipment and technologies, and the resolution of existing challenges and bottlenecks in the short- and mid-term horizons compelled the organization to undertake such strategic studies.

The Comprehensive Commercial Ports Plan was conducted to map the development and determine the capacity of national ports within the horizon of 2025 (1404 SH), taking into account the Twenty-Year National Vision Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1404). It was structured around four overarching perspectives: increasing the share of maritime transport and global exchanges; enhancing regional investment and economy with reliance on energy resources; sustaining the trajectory of globalization; and expanding regional agreements. Within this framework, Iran's key port network—particularly the ports of the Persian Gulf—was analyzed to identify strategic port nodes for investment and the implementation of national, international, and regional programs. Imam Khomeini Port was highlighted in this document as one of the major economic and industrial nodes among Iranian ports, recognized as capable of executing strategic and operational programs across national, international, regional, and local scales. Similarly, the Comprehensive Transport Plan of Iran (2003) (1382 SH) was formulated as a major strategic policy initiative of the Ministry of Roads and Transportation. The objective of this study was to prepare an integrated long-term program package for the development of intercity transport infrastructures over twenty years, spanning from 2010 to 2030 (1389–1409 SH). In the updated studies of the Comprehensive Commercial Ports Plan, the organization's approach to data collection, analysis, and assessment of the current state of maritime transport was grounded in a precise and specialized understanding of the operational performance of commercial port infrastructures and superstructures. In the modeling framework of the Comprehensive Transport Plan, emphasis was placed on the railway and roadway networks. Imam Khomeini Port was identified as one of the country's most important ports due to its connection to north–south port corridors, its role in linking southern and northern ports to the western and eastern borders of Iran, and its contribution to the expansion of national transit infrastructures in line with the policies of the Resistance Economy, thereby increasing the country's transit capacity.

In the vision of the Comprehensive Maritime Development Document of Iran—the draft of which was prepared by the Road, Housing, and Urban Development Research Center (2015) (1394 SH)—emphasis was placed on national-level maritime development, maritime security issues at both national and regional scales, competitive advantages in industry and economy, and the strategic value of maritime transport at the national and global levels. Similarly, in the Vision Document of the Ports and Maritime

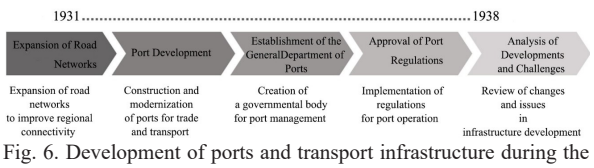


Fig. 6. Development of ports and transport infrastructure during the Pahlavi period. Source: Authors.

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Organization of Iran (2017) (1396 SH), strategic priorities were introduced for infrastructural and transport development, economic growth, maritime security, social responsibility, and the governance system of ports. The importance of the three dimensions of transport, economy, and industry in the country's principal ports—such as Imam Khomeini Port—is so profound that subsequent policy documents have placed additional emphasis on these strategies and objectives. In the National Logistics Master Plan (2018) (1397 SH) by the Deputy for Transport of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the development of the logistics industry and the improvement of the country's transport and trade cycle are addressed through the spatial allocation of logistics centers across the nation. Logistics centers not only function as hinges linking different modes of transport but also emerge as connecting nodes between trade and transportation, thereby underscoring their critical role in shaping and advancing logistics within the country. Based on logistics functions, transport accessibility, and geographical scope, the logistics centers of Iran are classified into five categories: Seaport Logistics Centers, Logistics Cities, Logistics Villages, Logistics Parks, and Border Logistics Parks. According to the chart of national logistics centers (p. 178 of the document), Imam Khomeini Port is identified as one of the strategic hubs of the country and designated as a Logistics Village.

In line with this plan, the National Spatial Planning Scheme—defined as the spatial allocation and distribution of population and activities across the national territory—was prepared by the Plan and Budget Organization in collaboration with relevant agencies, pursuant to Clause 1, Paragraph (a), Article 26 of the Sixth Five-Year Development Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Article 32 of the Law on Permanent Provisions of Development Programs of the Country. The scheme, with a horizon set for 2045 (1424 SH), was subsequently ratified by the Cabinet of Ministers. Within the national documents, including the General Policies of Principle 44 of the Constitution (2005) (1384 SH) and the National Spatial Planning Document (2020) (1399 SH), transport policies and the economic dimension of ports are emphasized as strategic priorities of the country. Transport policy is identified as one of the core provisions of these documents. According to these national frameworks, Imam Khomeini Port, owing to its strategic location, is recognized as one of the country's key economic, industrial, and transport hubs.

The principal development program for this port has been formulated on the basis of the international economy, with reference to both oil and non-oil economic activities, the provision of service and transport infrastructures, and the expansion of functional activities and human resources through regional job creation. Alongside large-scale industries, the establishment of a wide range of small- and medium-sized enterprises has been planned in the regional documents, offering significant advantages in industrial sectors and generating substantial employment in the area. Article 51, Section 11 (Transport and Housing) of the Sixth Five-Year Development Plan for the Economic, Social, and Cultural Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in accordance with the General Policies of Principle 44 of the Constitution and in pursuit of the goals of economic democratization, instructed the Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) to expand the infrastructures required for foreign trade services, enhance transit flows, and resolve transport challenges. According to this document, the PMO is authorized to advance its development programs in two major areas: (1) the establishment of investment companies aimed at strengthening international connectivity in major ports, and (2) the issuance of licenses for the construction of small ports to support local economies (Fig 7).

• Regional Documents

In the regional development plans for ports, aligned with national macro-policies and visions, port development programs have been designed and formulated in the domains of industrial, economic, tourism, environmental, and residential development, ensuring consistency with national programs. Building upon the port potentials of various regions in the east and south, specific policies have been defined for each port and port city so as to address all dimensions of the Twenty-Year National Vision Plan (2025) (1404 SH).

In the context of Khuzestan Province's ports—particularly the major ports in the western part of the province, including Imam Khomeini Port, Khorramshahr Port, and Abadan Port—the proposed programs have been planned on the basis of the strategic role of ports in industry, trade, and transport corridors at both national and international levels. Other initiatives at the intermediate or local scale have been defined in an evolutionary manner in relation to the economy and the transport system of the ports. A review of the regional documents indicates that two key policies—industrial development and connectivity—have been planned in accordance with national strategies and in pursuit of national and regional economic objectives,

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through the management of diverse industrial activities. What is emphasized in these plans, and positioned among the core priorities of port development, is the focus on regional- and intermediate-level programs that can redefine and elevate the connective role of the port at the national scale. Accordingly, national policies in strategic industries serve primarily as a justification for the importance of the location of the western Khuzestan ports within the country. At the same time, Imam Khomeini Port, as a pivotal industrial and connective hub at both national and international levels, holds a critical role in infrastructural and foundational development initiatives. Three regional documents pertaining to Imam Khomeini Port were analyzed on the basis of national development policies reviewed earlier: the Detailed Plan of the Area between the Police Station and Imam Khomeini Port; the Comprehensive Tourism Plan of Khuzestan Province; and the Provincial Spatial Planning Document of Khuzestan.

The Detailed Plan of the Area between the Police Station and Imam Khomeini Port (1999) (1378 SH) by the Khuzestan Provincial Housing and Urban Development Organization. This plan was formulated with a focus on the development of the port and its associated industrial, commercial, and transport infrastructure activities. The lands situated between Imam Khomeini Port and the entrance to the city of Bandar Imam were designated, according to the resolution of the Supreme Council for Urban Planning and Architecture of Iran in 1989 (1368 SH), for the use of maritime service industries. The rationale for this designation was articulated in two main domains: (1) transport infrastructure and (2) industrial and commercial activities (Fig. 8).

The city of Bandar Imam (formerly Sarbandar) is located 13 kilometers north of Imam Khomeini Port. The port development project encompasses an extensive area, with the lands situated between the port and Bandar Imam designated as future development reserves for the port. This development plan emphasizes two principal policies: (1) the expansion of transport routes—road, rail, waterway, and air—to enhance connectivity infrastructures at both national and international levels; and (2) the development of industrial and commercial activities. Within this framework, oil and petrochemical industries play a pivotal role in advancing the region's growth. Although this document was prepared by the Khuzestan Provincial Housing and Urban Development Organization and, in defining the land-use boundaries of the port, referred to the Urban Master Plan of 1989 (1368 SH), the city of Bandar Imam was overlooked in the process of port development and in the allocation of its urban lands to the project. The marginalization of Bandar Imam in other regional development programs is also evident. The Comprehensive Tourism Plan of Khuzestan Province, ratified in 2008 (1387 SH), was formulated on the basis of the general policies of the National Tourism Plan of 2001 (1380 SH). Its principal objectives included the socio-economic empowerment of various parts of the province by leveraging their natural, social, cultural, and historical capacities. This document refers to different areas of the province according to their respective potentials and elaborates specific tourism policies for them. However, among the various regions and ports of Khuzestan, no reference was made to Imam Khomeini Port and City, adjacent to Mahshahr Port, and no program was devised for the economic and social empowerment or poverty alleviation

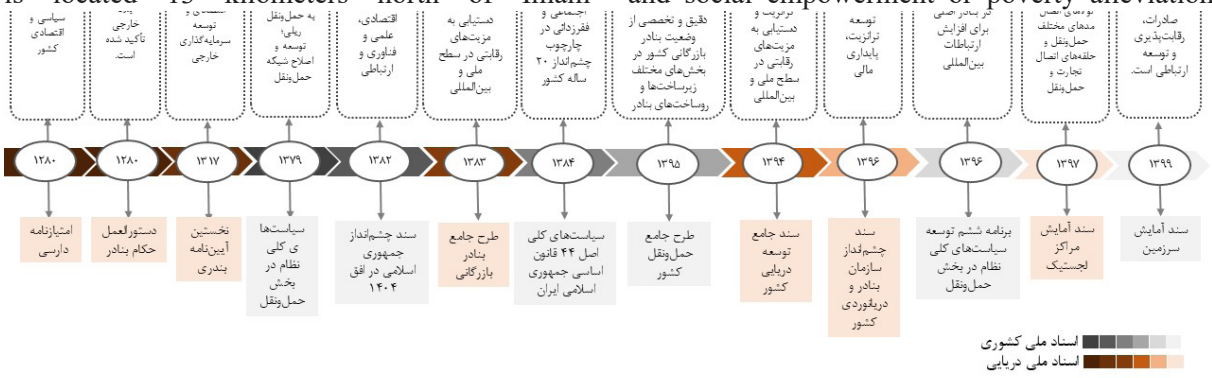


Fig. 7. Infographic of national upstream sub-provincial documents at both state and maritime levels concerning the principal ports (Imam Khomeini Port). Source: Authors.

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of this city within the province's future policies. Bandar Imam ranks among the weakest cities in the province in terms of economic, social, and welfare infrastructures, and despite its proximity to Imam Khomeini Port, it has not benefited from the port's development capacities. A decade later, in page 66 of the Khuzestan Provincial Spatial Planning Document (2018) (1397 SH), the facilities of Imam Khomeini Port—including 34 docks, petrochemical industrial complexes, and its national railway—were listed under the category of tourism attractions. Once again, however, Bandar Imam itself was excluded from this tourism-oriented policymaking.

In the Khuzestan Provincial Spatial Planning Document, Imam Khomeini Port is introduced as one of the key harbors of the province. An analysis of the hierarchy of service provision among the various settlements of the province reveals the relationships between the constituent elements of the hierarchical settlement system, framed by the linkages among the provincial capital, the core urban development centers, and the surrounding areas with their diverse residential dimensions. Within the area of Imam Khomeini Port, this relational framework is defined primarily as an economic–service-oriented structure. In this classification, the Mahshahr–Imam Khomeini Port Development Pole is positioned at the second level, with supra-provincial and provincial functions, owing to its economic capacity and its prominent role both within and beyond the province. According to the province's economic analysis of Mahshahr and its subordinate towns, the dominant specialization of this cluster is industrial–service-oriented. Indeed, the share of employment in the industrial sector in this region during the period 2011–2016 (1390–1395 SH) was aligned with national industrial employment trends (Khuzestan Provincial Spatial Planning Document, 2018 [1397 SH], p. 33) (Table 1) (Fig. 9). Imam Khomeini Port is designated as a port within a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). As a commercial port of the province with supra-national and international functions, it plays a pivotal role in global trade. The transport sector of Khuzestan Province, owing to the presence of Imam Khomeini Port and its international role in world commerce, together with its substantial share in the nation's imports and exports and its supra-regional impact on rail and road transport, constitutes one of the province's most significant economic sectors (ibid., 43, 102).

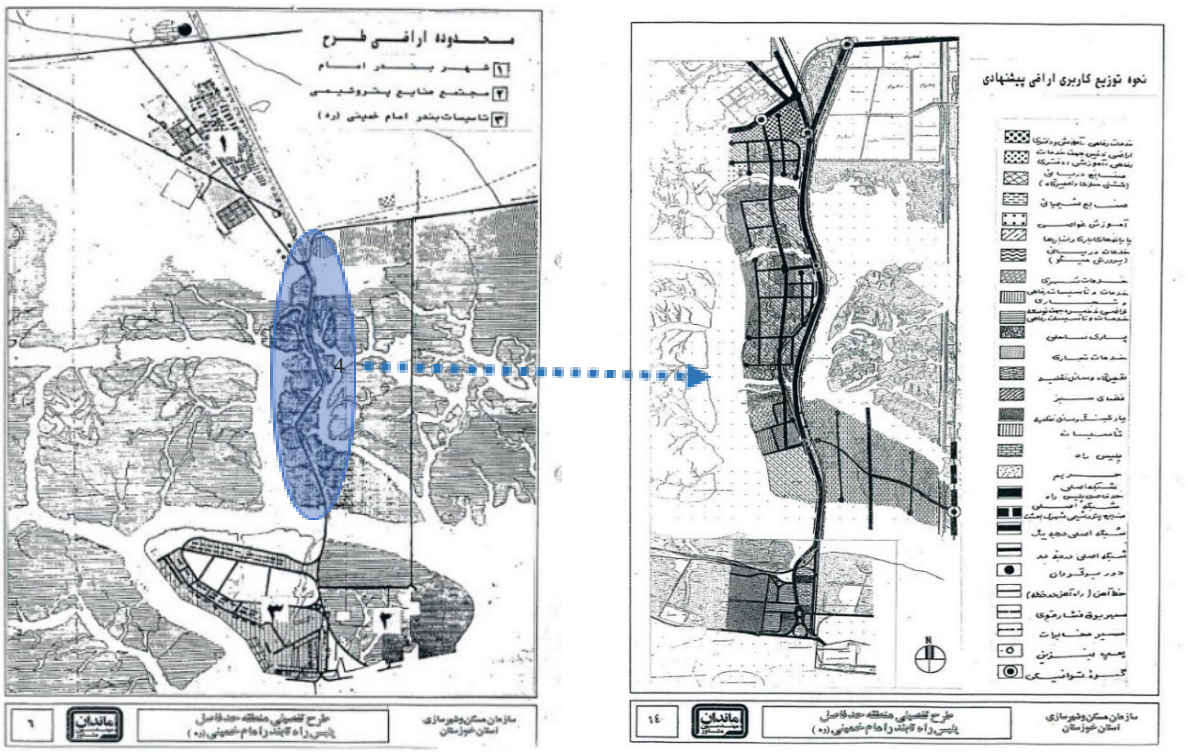


Fig. 8. Zone No. 4: the lands between the port and the city of Imam, designated as reserve lands for port development. Source: Detailed Plan of the Area between the Police Station and Imam Khomeini Port, 1999 (1378 SH).

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• Regional (Sub-Provincial) Documents

Within their functional areas, ports are integrated into efficient transport chains through various concepts of multimodal logistics. Consequently, their activities and functional responsibilities extend even beyond urban or regional boundaries. The independence of port operational structures, in relation to the organizational frameworks of hinterland regions, reflects a prevailing transformation whereby the port, at the outset, is defined in alignment with national port policies. As a result, ports are selected and incorporated into logistics networks that are organized at a supra-national scale around major transport companies and intermediaries. This development leads to the expansion of structured activity and service centers situated in the lands surrounding the port, bringing together a cluster of production units and warehouses of multiple companies and providing shared services. Thus, in practice, the port transcends the sub-provincial scale.

The spatial expansion of port activities has gradually been organized into a service and logistics domain at a supra-national scale, extending beyond the territorial scope of the neighboring city at the sub-provincial level. Accordingly, with the development of Imam Khomeini Port and the growth of its associated service lands surrounding the city of Bandar Imam, four Regional (Sub-Provincial) Documents were examined in relation to the feasibility of programs and the validation of port areas in interaction with the city. The city of Sarbandar was established in 1955 (1334 SH) as a satellite and provisional settlement, following port development policies aimed at accommodating the workforce of the port's industrial and service units. The first residents of this township were port workers and employees, particularly those employed in the petrochemical sector. By 1976 (1355 SH), 96% of all tenants in Sarbandar were employees of the port's public and private sectors.

After the Revolution and with the onset of the Iran–Iraq War, a large influx of war-displaced populations from Abadan and Khorramshahr settled in this city. During the war (1980–1988/1359–1367 SH), Sarbandar experienced a population growth rate of 15.4%. The city's social structure was composed of two main groups: port workers and war-displaced populations. This socially fragmented structure contributed to the emergence of fragmented neighborhoods in the southern part of the city. The lack of a coherent urban identity in Sarbandar led to the formation of fragmented spaces within the city's spatial boundaries. Following the end of the war in 1988 (1367 SH), the increase in population and the necessity of organizing and housing Sarbandar's residents prompted the preparation of the Urban Master Plan of Mahshahr and Sarbandar. The plan delineated the spheres of influence of the two cities based on residents' ease of access to either. Furthermore, as the lands between the city and the port had been allocated for the port's future expansion, Sarbandar's development axis was designated to extend linearly toward the north and northeast. The urban structure was shaped by a network of intercity roads functioning at an extra-urban scale, designed both to facilitate port transportation and to serve local residents' connectivity needs. Around these roads, neighborhoods were spatially allocated in a geometric, grid-like pattern. The city's territorial domain for future development was also defined with a northward extension of its main axis.

According to the various land uses designated for Sarbandar in the Urban Master Plan of 2007 (1386 SH), the highest per capita land-use allocations belong respectively to residential and transport uses, with land-use shares of 20.37% and 16.02% (Fig. 10).

This indicates the weakness of the city's infrastructures and underscores that residential settlements and transport infrastructures were the two primary factors shaping the city. Other urban infrastructures were defined at significantly lower per capita levels and in a fragmented manner. Overall, despite Sarbandar being designated as a "city" on the basis of its quantitative population figures, it lacked coherent organization and adequate urban infrastructures. At that time, Sarbandar functioned as an aggregate of residential townships with a fragmented identity. Between 1988 (1367 SH) and 2015 (1394 SH), no plan at the sub-provincial scale or for the city itself was prepared. The majority of plans concerning the Mahshahr–Imam Khomeini Port

Table 1. Share of employment in the industrial sector at provincial and national levels, 2011–2016 (1390–1395 SH). Source: Khuzestan Provincial Spatial Planning Document, 2018 [1397 SH], p. 33

2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	Level
28.7	31.2	31.5	30.7	32.7	34.8	Province
31.9	32.5	33.8	34.3	33.4	33.4	Country

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region were formulated at national and regional scales, primarily oriented toward the specialized development of the port.

In response to the city's problems and welfare infrastructure crises, the Urban Detailed Development Plan of Bandar Imam was prepared in (2015) (1394 SH), referring back to the Urban Master Plan of (1988) (1367 SH). Similar to the master plan, this detailed development plan lacked comprehensive programming and consisted merely of a set of general and fragmented regulations and guidelines. The provisions developed to address the city's crises proved ineffective, leaving Bandar Imam to continue struggling with its existing structural problems. During this period, transportation and warehousing in various industries constituted the predominant services within the city.

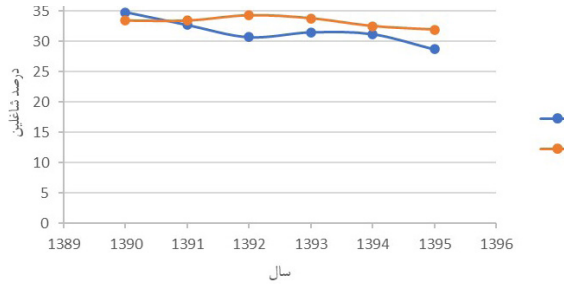
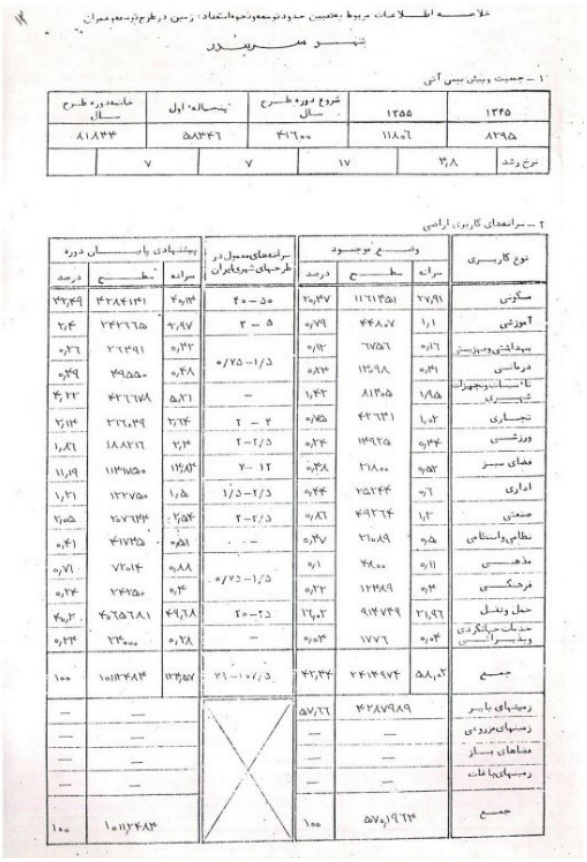


Fig. 9. Comparative diagram of industrial sector employment growth (2011–2016/1390–1395) in Mahshahr Port and its subordinate areas, demonstrating that provincial growth has paralleled national industrial trends. This highlights the concentration of national and provincial policies on industrial–service infrastructures in this port. Source: Authors.

Most neighborhoods of the city have low population densities, and land-use distribution across the city has not been proposed in a balanced manner. The majority of neighborhoods lack welfare, cultural, healthcare, educational, service, and commercial infrastructures. Meanwhile, the city's designated development boundaries extend far beyond its actual population capacity and potential population absorption. Consequently, the city exhibits a sprawled structure characterized by vacant lands and low-density settlement patterns (Fig. 11).

According to the performance statistics of the Housing Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in (2020) (1399 SH), various housing programs—including Mehr Housing, Social Housing, Incremental Housing, and National Housing—were implemented across the provinces of Iran. Under these programs, the Housing Foundation was designated as the authority responsible for constructing multiple housing projects in the city of Sarbandar. The construction activities were predominantly concentrated in the northern part of the city. The lands allocated for this purpose were designated under the Urban Master Plan and the Urban Detailed Development Plan of (2015) (1394 SH); however, they lacked the necessary urban, welfare, and service infrastructures. In 2022 (1401 SH), the Supreme Council of Urban Planning and Architecture of Iran ratified a resolution concerning the fundamental inconsistency between the detailed development plan and the master plan of Bandar Imam and Mahshahr. Given the multiple constraints surrounding these two cities—resulting from the heavy concentration of oil, gas, and petrochemical industries and the accompanying environmental considerations—it was decided that, to ensure the availability of sufficient lands for future urban expansion, the New Towns Development Company should undertake the siting of a new township or city in the northern hinterlands of the two cities, on suitable state-owned lands.

It appears that in the contemporary period, the overarching development policies in Imam



۱۳۴۵	۱۳۵۵	شروع دوره طرح	پنجساله اول	خاتمه دوره طرح سال
۸۲۹۵	۱۱۸۰۶	۴۰۶۰۰	۵۸۳۴۶	۸۱۸۳۳
نرخ رشد	۳٫۸	۱۷	۷	۷

نوع کاربری	وضع موجود سرانه	وضع موجود سطح	وضع موجود درصد	سرانه‌های پیشنهادی در طرحهای شهری ایران	پیشنهادی پایان دوره سرانه	پیشنهادی پایان دوره سطح	پیشنهادی پایان دوره درصد
مسکونی	۲۷٫۹۱	۱۱۶۱۴۵۱	۲۵٫۴۷	۴۰ – ۵۰	۴۰٫۱۴	۴۳۲۸۴۱۴۱	۳۲٫۴۹
آموزشی	۱٫۱	۴۴۸۰۷	۰٫۷۹	۳ – ۵	۲٫۸۷	۳۴۴۲۶۵	۲٫۶
بهداشتی و درمانی	۰٫۱۶	۶۷۵۶	۰٫۱۲	۰/۷۵ – ۱/۵	۰٫۳۲	۲۰۲۴۹۱	۰٫۲۶
درمانی	۰٫۳۱	۱۲۹۹۸	۰٫۲۳		۰٫۴۸	۴۹۵۵۰	۰٫۳۹
تأسیسات و تجهیزات شهری	۱٫۸۵	۸۱۴۰۵	۱٫۴۳	–	۵٫۲۱	۴۲۶۷۸۸	۳٫۲۲
تجاری	۱٫۰۲	۴۲۶۳۱	۰٫۷۵	۲ – ۴	۲٫۶۴	۲۲۶۰۳۹	۲٫۱۴
ورزشی	۰٫۳۴	۱۴۹۲۵	۰٫۲۶	۱/۵ – ۲	۲٫۳	۱۸۸۲۱۲	۱٫۴۲
فضای سبز	۹٫۵۲	۳۱۸۰۰	۰٫۴۸	۱۲ – ۲۰	۱۳٫۵۴	۱۱۴۱۷۵۰	۱۱٫۱۹
اداری	۰٫۶	۲۵۲۴۴	۰٫۴۴	۲/۵ – ۱/۵	۱٫۵	۱۲۲۷۵۰	۱٫۲۱
صنعتی	۱٫۲	۴۹۲۶۴	۰٫۸۶	۲/۵ – ۴	۲٫۵۴	۲۶۲۶۳۴	۲٫۵۵
نظامی و انتظامی	۰٫۵	۲۱۰۸۹	۰٫۳۷	- -	۰٫۵۱	۴۱۷۲۵	۰٫۴۱
مذهبی	۰٫۱۱	۴۶۰۰	۰٫۱	۰/۷۵ – ۱/۵	۰٫۸۸	۷۴۰۱۴	۰٫۷۱
فرهنگی	۰٫۳۳	۱۳۸۱۹	۰٫۲۴		۰٫۳	۲۴۴۵۰	۰٫۲۴
حمل و نقل	۳٫۹۶	۱۶۰۹۳	۹۱۴۷۴۹	۲۰ – ۲۵	۴۹٫۱۸	۵۰۵۶۶۸۱	۴۰٫۳۰
خدمات خیابانگردی و پیرامونی	۰٫۰۴	۱۷۷۶	۰٫۰۵۳	–	۰٫۲۸	۲۳۰۰۰	۰٫۲۳
جمع	۵۸٫۰۳	۲۴۱۴۹۷۴	۴۲٫۴۴	۲۱ – ۱۰۷/۵	۱۳۳٫۵۷	۱۰۱۱۳۴۸۴	۱۰۰
زمینهای بایر		۴۲۸۷۹۸۹	۵۷٫۲۲				
زمینهای مرزوی							
مناطق ساز							
زمینهای با مات							
جمع		۵۷۰۱۹۶۳	۱۰۰			۱۰۱۱۲۴۸۴	۱۰۰

Fig 10. Per capita land-use allocations and their respective percentages in the city of Sarbandar, 1988 (1367 SH). Source: Urban Master Plan of Mahshahr and Sarbandar.

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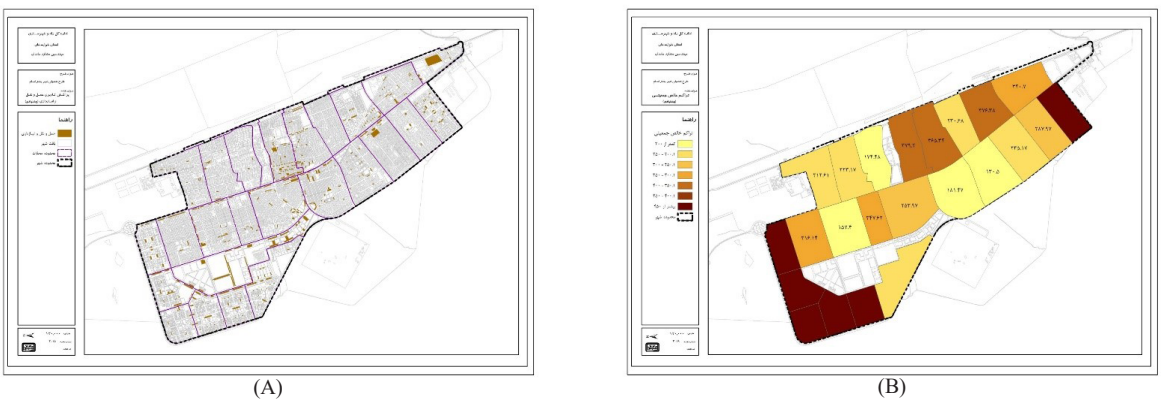
Khomeini Port have been primarily focused on economic and industrial dimensions. However, these policies require revision regarding their cultural and social appendices. For the realization of sustainable development, programs must be accompanied by the active participation of local communities, ensuring that attention is directed not only toward economic growth but also toward the enhancement of the social quality of life for the region's inhabitants (Fig. 12).

Discussion

• General Strategies of National Documents

A review of 13 national upstream documents across three historical periods reveals that the economic, industrial, and transport sectors—as overarching strategic priorities—have played the most significant roles in shaping national development at both terrestrial and maritime scales. An important point in the reviewed documents is the differentiation between the strategies and development visions assigned to major ports and those allocated to small ports in Iran. Issues such as social responsibility, local economy, poverty alleviation, and tourism infrastructures have been planned and mandated for small ports such as Shadegan, Arvandkenar, or Chouebdeh in Khuzestan Province. Conversely, major ports are framed as strategic assets at national and international levels, where the interests of local communities in their development are largely overlooked. For instance, in certain national documents—such as the National Development Vision Document—the development and poverty alleviation of port cities adjacent to major ports, like Shahid Beheshti Port in Chabahar, are explicitly referenced. However, in the strategies concerning Imam Khomeini Port, none of the reviewed documents refer to the processes of economic, social, or welfare infrastructure development in its adjacent city of Sarbandar. National policies in strategic industries along the eastern and southern corridors of Iran underscore the significance of ports' geographic positioning. Imam Khomeini Port, in this regard, serves as a strategic industrial and logistical nexus at both national and international levels, bearing particular importance in infrastructural development. In the General Policies of Article 44 of the Constitution, aimed at expanding infrastructures necessary for foreign trade services, increasing transit flows, and resolving transport challenges, as well as in the Comprehensive National Transport Plan and the General Transport Policies of the System, the formulation of long-term, integrated programs for the construction and expansion of intercity transport infrastructures has been considered among the principal long-term strategies. Within this framework, ports and maritime transport have been prioritized for investment and the optimal utilization of major ports has been defined as a key objective. Logistics centers not only function as pivotal nodes linking different modes of transportation but also emerge as critical connectors between trade and transport, highlighting their central role in the formation and advancement of logistics in the country. Accordingly, the development and integration of domestic and international port networks stand as essential policies, through which the strengthening of connectivity networks will enable regional economic growth by advancing maritime and port-related activities.

In this regard, the development of the national



(A) (B)

Fig. 11. A) Transport and warehousing uses as the highest per capita land-use allocation in Sarbandar, 2015 (1394 SH). Source: Urban Detailed Development Plan of Bandar Imam, 2015 (1394 SH). B) Low population density across much of Sarbandar and the city's spatial expansion exceeding its population absorption capacity. Source: Urban Detailed Development Plan of Bandar Imam, 2015 (1394 SH).

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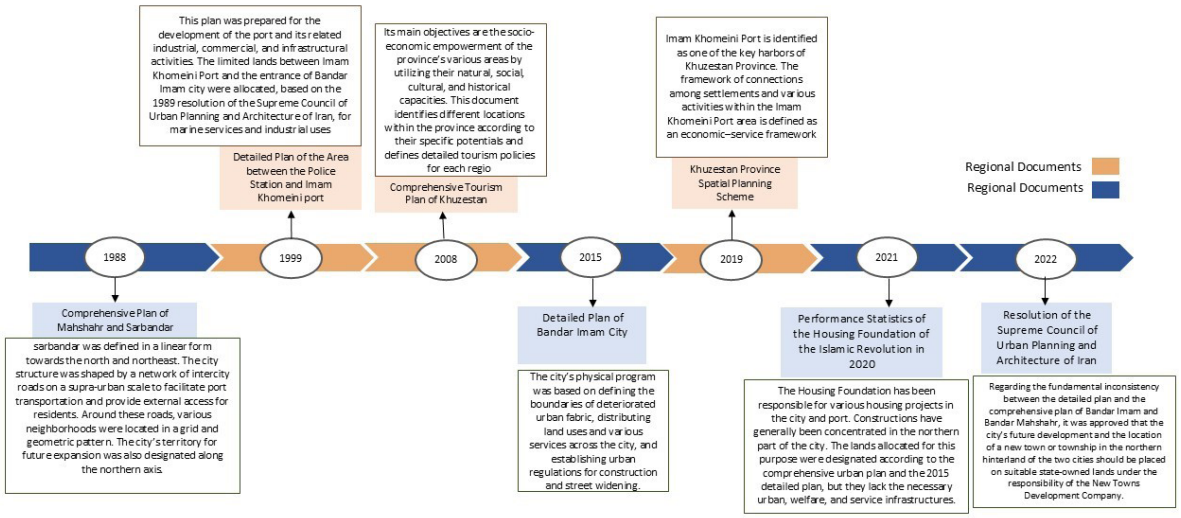


Fig. 12. Infographic of regional and sub-provincial upstream documents in Khuzestan Province. Source: Authors.

economy within the framework of the global economy and the enhancement of competitiveness in international markets constitute key overarching strategies. To achieve these objectives, social and functional participation across various domains has been proposed. Such participation, at multiple social and functional layers both domestically and internationally, enables investment at national, regional, and sub-provincial levels, with a significant portion of this responsibility assigned to Iran's ports. The Imam Khomeini Logistics Village, with the highest level of functional capacity, operational scope, and international reach in exports, imports, and transit, operates as the country's gateway for trade and transportation. By virtue of its designation as a Special Economic Zone, it plays a pivotal role in national transport and trade.

According to the reviewed documents, the strategic priorities of the major ports can be summarized in seven strategies, as illustrated in Figure 6. With specific reference to Imam Khomeini Port, its development strategies can be interpreted within two overarching categories: industrial–economic infrastructure and connectivity infrastructure. Ultimately, the general development objectives of Imam Khomeini Port can be assessed in three domains: enhancing functional capacity, advancing transport systems, and promoting economic growth (Fig. 13). Therefore, the economic strategy at the macro level constitutes the most important approach in the development of Imam Khomeini Port. Subsequently, the connectivity development strategy plays a significant role in shaping the port's operations at both national and transnational scales. Part of the expansion of this infrastructure is directed toward the growth of the port's economic base and the strengthening of its financial sustainability. Ultimately, the significance of Imam Khomeini Port's development lies in these two strategies, as they underpin the infrastructural advancement required to achieve the enhancement of the port's functional capacity at both national and transnational levels (Fig. 14).

A review of the regional upstream documents shows that two primary policies—industrial development and connectivity development—have been planned based on national policies. The national policies in strategic industries merely serve to justify the locational importance of Imam Khomeini Port, which, as a strategic industrial and logistical nexus at both national and international levels, holds high significance in infrastructural and foundational development efforts. The policies and programs outlined in these plans can play a role in the siting of various industrial–service projects. Given the broad range of general programs presented under overarching strategies, it is possible to assess and manage feasible policies with reference to regional opportunities. However, these programs focus exclusively on the port and its related infrastructures, leaving the city of Imam without any developmental infrastructure—economic, industrial, social, welfare, or intra-urban connectivity—in the course of port expansion. This has become a major factor in the polarization and segregation of the city and port within the region.

The strategic importance of Imam Khomeini Port, in terms of its geographic, industrial, and connectivity positioning, lies in its dual role:

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ensuring communication and economic security on the one hand, and striving to dominate regional markets and attract foreign investment on the other. The realization of macroeconomic and transport objectives in this port is contingent upon the programs defined in national and regional upstream documents, enabling Imam Khomeini Port to effectively fulfill its role as a development base, a driver of national economic growth, and Iran's maritime and land-based hub. The promotion and expansion of service, production, warehousing, and transport activities are critical in shaping national and transnational maritime and land corridors. Prioritizing port-based development through the designation of zones earmarked for port-related growth constitutes one of the key headings of the sub-provincial programs for Imam Khomeini Port and the city of Sarbandar.

From this perspective, the programs and policies presented in the plan are largely repetitions of those in other national development schemes, with little substantive change introduced. In the formulation of strategies, the titles are, in fact, direct repetitions of the strategies already articulated in higher-level plans at both national and regional scales. The explanatory sections, however, are limited to proposals for the construction of a few service and administrative buildings and the specification of certain regulatory provisions. At the regional level, actions are undertaken at an intermediate scale—for example, the expansion or widening of roadways serving port-related transportation. At the sub-provincial level, measures are of a more localized scale, primarily focused on the enforcement of urban regulations within the city (Fig. 15).

Conclusion

The review and analysis of twenty national, regional, and sub-provincial upstream documents related to the development of Imam Khomeini Port in Khuzestan Province reveal that policymaking and planning processes at different scales are evidently fragmented and lack coherence. National upstream documents, predominantly macro-oriented and framed around transnational interests, have defined the port as a strategic infrastructure within international transport networks and the global economy, without assigning any role to enhancing livability or empowering the local community, particularly the city of Sarbandar. Within this context, the scalar disjunction between national policies and regional, especially sub-provincial, realities has gradually excluded Sarbandar from developmental considerations. Regional documents, in continuation of national strategies, remain subservient to port development and display no evidence of acknowledging or addressing the socio-spatial needs of residents. Meanwhile, sub-provincial documents, with their focus on urban domains, have often failed to establish effective linkages with the port, thereby reinforcing spatial–functional fragmentation. At the same time, Sarbandar has never truly possessed a coherent urban structure and, in practice, has functioned as a collection of satellite settlements surrounding the port, its role in development reduced merely to serving as a residential enclave for port workers and employees.

Over time, Imam Khomeini Port has evolved as a point-based, sectoral, and isolated project, operating at national and international functional levels, while the Khuzestan region and the city of Sarbandar have merely served as its geographic hosts. Development under this model has not only failed to correlate with improvements in the quality of life of the local population but has also directed the benefits largely beyond the territorial boundaries of Khuzestan. In this way, the province has become a platform for the development of others, with the local community relegated to the role of passive observers at the margins of a development trajectory never designed for them. This developmental contradiction is manifested in the juxtaposition of national and local scales within the adjacent spatial plans of the city and the port: two spatial configurations of similar form,

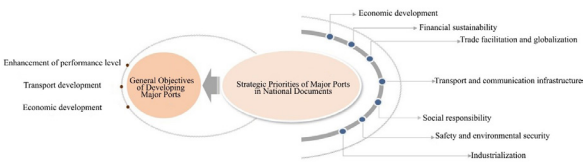


Fig. 13. Strategic priorities and overarching development objectives of major ports, with emphasis on the development of Imam Khomeini Port, based on 13 national upstream documents across three historical periods: Qajar, Pahlavi, and the Islamic Republic. Source: Authors.

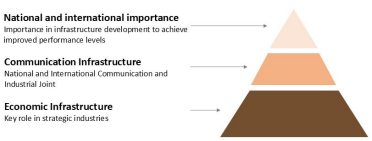


Fig. 14. According to the provisions of national upstream documents, the two strategies of connectivity infrastructure and economic infrastructure are among the most important national strategies in articulating the strategic significance of Imam Khomeini Port within the country and in achieving national development. Source: Authors.

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yet yielding opposing outcomes—deprivation for the residential area of Sarbandar, and spatial–functional prosperity for the industrial–economic zone of the port (Fig. 16).

Ultimately, the development of Sarbandar has not been pursued as part of an integrated vision for port development, but rather in a fragmented, ad hoc manner, responding primarily to the operational needs of the port. The multiplicity of governing bodies, the absence of synergistic policymaking, and the neglect of local capacities have collectively prevented the emergence of a genuine urban fabric for Sarbandar at the sub-provincial level. This situation underscores the necessity of a fundamental re-examination of Imam Khomeini Port's development model in light of spatial justice, institutional integration, and the enhancement of local community participation. Moreover, redefining the role and position of Sarbandar in development programs—as an "agglomeration of satellite or labor settlements," interconnected internally and functionally tied to the port—is an essential prerequisite for sustainable development in this area.

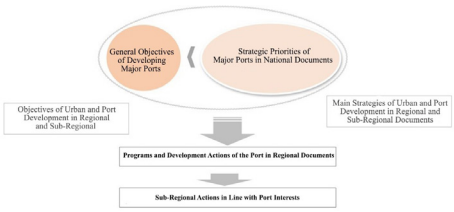


Fig. 15. The development of Imam Khomeini Port in regional and sub-provincial upstream documents is confined to intermediate- and small-scale actions. These measures are subordinate to the strategies of national upstream documents, while the regional and sub-provincial levels lack independent strategies and programs. Source: Authors.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there was no conflict for them in conducting this research.

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Fig. 16. Contradictions in regional- and sub-provincial-scale actions. The city of Sarbandar and the port development zone share a similar industrial-oriented plan, yet have produced divergent outcomes: Sarbandar has remained underdeveloped, facing deprivation and poverty, while the port area, through the expansion of industrial activities, has transformed into a developed and strategically significant part of the port. Source: Authors.

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