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*Original Research Article*

# The Impact of Physical Development Incompatibilities on Place Identity and Sense of Belonging (A Case Study of Tar Village)*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the mismatch between recent physical developments and the village's inherent sense of place in the village of Tar. In many Iranian villages particularly within the framework of rural master plans development interventions have primarily focused on improving physical structures and infrastructure, often neglecting the cultural, natural, and social contexts of the setting. The present research adopts a descriptive analytical method, and data were collected through library studies and field observations. During a field visit to the village (May 2025), the spatial structure, public spaces, patterns of social interaction, and residents' lived experiences were examined through direct observation and informal interviews. The findings indicate that recent physical developments, especially in the upper part of the village, are inconsistent with the natural setting and cultural identity of the area. This inconsistency has led to a weakening of the sense of place, a decline in social interactions, and a fragmentation of local identity. Therefore, physical planning in rural areas can only be sustainable and effective when it is grounded in an understanding of place, cultural values, and residents' social needs emerging from within the context and lived experiences of the local community rather than being imposed from outside.

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## Introduction

In recent decades, the concept of place attachment has emerged as one of the key components in assessing the livability and quality of human settlements. Scholars in geography, architecture, and urban planning have extensively examined this concept (Tuan, 1979; Relph, 1976). Place attachment is formed through the emotional, cognitive, and experiential bonds individuals develop with their environment, and it materializes when a setting can generate identity, memory, and meaning for its inhabitants (Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

In many Iranian villages, physical development projects particularly rural master plans (Tarh-e Hadi) have been implemented without sufficient consideration for the symbolic and identity-related dimensions of place. Such an approach often weakens the sense of place and diminishes residents' emotional and functional connection with their everyday environment (Low & Altman, 1992).

Tar Village, located in Natanz County, serves as a representative case where recent physical developments have altered spatial patterns, social interactions, and residents' perceptions of place. The present study seeks to analyze the impact of these developments on the key components of place attachment by applying Scannell and Gifford's (2010) tripartite theoretical model. This framework explores the relationship between the physical, social, and psychological dimensions of place and residents' lived experiences.

The research investigates the incompatibilities between physical development and place identity in Tar Village. Despite certain physical improvements, many rural development projects face challenges stemming from insufficient attention to the cultural and social characteristics of rural communities. Such neglect can lead to a weakened sense of belonging and, ultimately, increased migration from villages. Therefore, analyzing the effects of these physical transformations on the spatial and social identity of residents is essential.

The main objective of this study is to examine how physical developments influence the spatial essence and sense of place in Tar Village. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the effects of physical development on the village's place identity.
2. To analyze the inconsistencies between physical development and the cultural and social characteristics of the inhabitants.

This study aims to provide insights for planners and policymakers seeking to create a balance between physical development and the socio-cultural needs of rural communities.

## Research Questions

Main Question:

How have the physical developments in Tar Village affected the components of residents' sense of place?

Sub-questions:

1. Which physical, cultural, and natural characteristics of Tar contribute to the formation of its sense of place?
2. How have the developments introduced through the Tarh-e Hadi (Rural Master Plan) plan weakened or

## Research Method

This study employs a descriptive–analytical design with a qualitative approach. The main objective is to examine how recent physical developments have affected the sense of place and place attachment in Tar Village. To achieve this, data were collected from two primary sources: Literature and field observations.

In the library phase, documents related to the Tarh-e Hadi (rural master plan), rural development reports, previous studies, and theoretical frameworks concerning the concepts of place, sense of place, and place attachment were analyzed. In the field phase, the research team visited the village in May 2025 to conduct direct observations of spatial structures, the functionality of public spaces, types of construction, quality of pathways, and how the residents utilized space. To further understand the lived experiences and perceptions of residents toward physical transformations, informal and purposive interviews were conducted with local inhabitants. These interviews followed a non-structured format, relying on descriptive documentation of participants' perceptions and experiences of their everyday environment.

Data analysis was based on the three-dimensional model of place attachment proposed by Scannell and Gifford, which includes the dimensions of place, process of experience, and person. Within this framework, physical, social, and perceptual indicators were extracted, and findings were compared between two main areas: the lower section (gardens and historical spaces) and the upper section (new developments).

This methodological structure enabled the integrated analysis of:

1. Objective physical and spatial characteristics (through direct observation);
2. Residents' lived experiences and memories (through local interviews); and
3. Theoretical concepts of place identity and attachment (through literature review).

Through this synthesis, the study provides a precise interpretation of how new physical developments have influenced the place identity of the village.

## Literature Review

Over the past decades, Tarh-e Hadi plans have been recognized as the main instruments for guiding the physical development of rural settlements in Iran. However, evaluations reveal that these plans have often failed to achieve sustainable development or preserve the social and cultural structures of rural communities. Numerous studies emphasize that the neglect of cultural, historical, and social contexts during the design and implementation processes has resulted in identity discontinuities and weakened place attachment in many villages.





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Anabestani and Akbari (2013) found in their study of rural master plans in Jahrom County that these plans were largely ineffective in enhancing settlement stability or reducing migration due to their lack of alignment with residents' real needs and disregard for rural lifestyles. Similarly, Pourtaheri et al. (2013), in their study of rural master plans in Eivan-e Gharb County, concluded that although certain physical interventions such as road paving and housing improvements had been implemented, these actions failed to yield sustainable impacts on villagers' lives because they were disconnected from cultural and social contexts and in some cases, even weakened social cohesion.

Overall, previous research highlights that the core issue in rural master plans lies not in their technical or physical dimensions but in their failure to acknowledge place identity and the socio-cultural aspects of rural settlements. Thus, rural development planning must adopt a context-sensitive approach, where identity-forming elements such as gardens, communal spaces, historical sites, and livelihood patterns constitute essential components of the planning process.

Despite the extensive body of research assessing the performance of Tarh-e Hadi projects, relatively few studies have explicitly addressed the relationship between physical development and sense of place. This study, focusing on Tar Village, aims to fill this gap by demonstrating how physical interventions can either weaken or reinforce place identity and residents' lived experiences.

## Theoretical Foundations

### • The concept of development

Development is a complex and dynamic process that continuously evolves within social and economic systems. Since the mid-twentieth century, approaches to development have shifted from a primarily financial and infrastructural model toward a more human-centered and institutional model. This transition emphasizes the enhancement of individuals' and communities' quality of life through education, healthcare, social participation, and social justice (Taghipour Akhtari et al., 2024).

Human development refers to the achievement of both individual and collective capabilities that drive social and economic transformation. Thus, development should not be confined to economic dimensions alone but must also address social, cultural, and environmental aspects.

In the context of rural development, this process must consider not only economic features but also the cultural identity and social needs of rural communities. Consequently, the concept of sustainable development has become a central approach in rural planning, aiming to preserve and strengthen local and indigenous identities. Achieving sustainable development requires a comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of both the environment and the sense of place.

### • The concept of place

Place is a dynamic and multilayered concept that emerges from the continuous interaction between humans and their environment. The landscape as both an objective and subjective phenomenon embodies the intersection of form, experience, and meaning; thus, a place is far more than a mere geographic location (Mansouri, 2005).

Space transforms into place when it becomes legible, perceptible, and experiential that is, when an individual can establish a mental, sensory, and symbolic connection with it. Hence, place simultaneously possesses two interrelated dimensions: the physical and the meaningful. The features that enable space to become a meaningful place include the presence of core and distinctive elements, historical continuity, spatial legibility, coherent spatial structure, and the integration of natural and cultural components. These qualities allow a place to transcend its physical functionality and embody meaning, memory, and identity.

According to Manzo (2005), human experience of place is not uniform but shaped by individuals' cultural, social, historical, and biographical backgrounds. As a result, one place may be perceived as positive, memorable, and identity-forming for some people, yet meaningless or even unpleasant for others. This diversity underscores the decisive role of perception and personal engagement in shaping the sense of place. Tuan (1979) also emphasizes that place is constructed through lived experience through dwelling, working, remembering, and forming social relationships within an environment. Thus, place is not merely the outcome of physical form; it is a human-centered phenomenon deeply embedded in emotional and social layers of experience.

In summary, place can be understood as the convergence of three essential components:

1. Space and physical form
2. Individual experience and perception
3. Cultural and historical context

A place acquires identity and value when these three dimensions exist in balance and harmony (Fig. 1).

Based on this understanding, it is essential to consider the meaning of place and its perceptual and identity-related characteristics in the process of physical design and planning. Physical planning that neglects the identity of place can lead to cultural discontinuities, a weakened sense of belonging, and the erosion of social bonds.

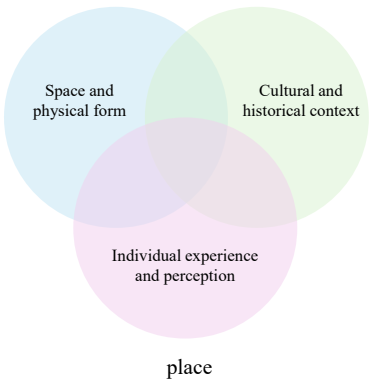



Fig. 1. Conceptual Model of Place and Its Components. Source: Authors.



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### • Sense of place

Sense of place refers to individuals' mental and emotional perception of their environment a perception that fosters an internal bond with a location and allows people to experience it as part of their identity (Falahat, 2006). This sense enables individuals to feel comfort, security, familiarity, and meaning within a particular environment, aligning their presence with the spatial context. Therefore, sense of place is not merely the result of visual observation or functional use of space; rather, it arises from lived experience and repeated human interactions with the environment.

From a phenomenological perspective, places possess a "spirit" a collection of perceptual, symbolic, historical, and biological cues that evolve over time and become embedded in both individual and collective memory. It is this spirit of place that causes locations to hold different and sometimes even opposing meanings for different people. In other words, places are understood and interpreted through everyday experiences, shared events, personal memories, and social values. Sense of place is strengthened when these layers of meaning are perceptible and interpretable within the physical context.

As Relph (1976) points out, a genuine sense of place emerges when the relationship between humans and their environment is authentic, continuous, and undisturbed. Conversely, any physical intervention that disregards the contextual, historical, lifestyle, or social characteristics of a setting can lead to placelessness or a diminished sense of place. Thus, sense of place is a dynamic, context-dependent concept that evolves with social, physical, and cultural transformations.

### • Place attachment

Place attachment represents a deeper stage of connection than sense of place. It refers to the emotional, identity-based, and social bond between an individual and the environment. In this state, people perceive a place not merely as a space for living but as an integral part of their identity and life experience (Falahat, 2006). This attachment makes a place feel familiar, meaningful, and valuable; therefore, its alteration or loss can lead to a sense of identity and emotional disruption.

According to Low and Altman (1992), place attachment results from the interplay between lived experiences, social relationships, personal memories, and cultural context. In other words, attachment develops when individuals engage in meaningful and repeated experiences with their environment over time. This demonstrates that place attachment is a gradual and dynamic process, not a static quality or one determined solely by physical form.

Place attachment can be examined through two main dimensions:

1. Social attachment–Emerging from human relationships, collective participation, shared history, and daily social interactions. The more active and cohesive these social relations are, the stronger the identity bond with the place becomes.
2. Physical attachment–Related to spatial quality, legibility, perceptibility, and the degree of harmony between the physical environment and residents' ways of living. Environments whose physical structures align with local lifestyles foster stronger attachment.

In conclusion, strengthening place attachment requires simultaneous attention to both social and physical dimensions. Any development intervention that neglects one of these aspects can weaken attachment and, consequently, undermine place identity. This issue is particularly critical in rural settlements, where local identity is deeply intertwined with memory, nature, livelihood, and communal spaces.

## Theoretical Model for Analyzing Place Attachment

To analyze place attachment in this study, the tripartite model of Scannell and Gifford (2010) was employed. This model conceptualizes place attachment as a multilayered phenomenon that arises from the interaction among three core dimensions: Person, Process, and Place. Each dimension captures a different aspect of the human environment relationship and, when combined, provides a holistic understanding of attachment (Table 1).

This model simultaneously integrates the emotional, cognitive, and physical dimensions of place, making it a more comprehensive and suitable framework for analyzing rural settlements than one-dimensional models (e.g., purely physical or purely social).

In the context of Iranian rural environments where identity and lived experience are deeply interwoven with nature, livelihoods, and oral traditions this model allows for a clear distinction between:

1. Places that have preserved their identity, and
2. Places that have undergone identity disruption due to incompatible physical development.

Table 1. Analytical Framework of Place Attachment Based on Scannell & Gifford (2010).

| Dimension | Description | Key Analytical Question | Relevance to This Study |
|---|---|---|---|
| Person | Individual and collective backgrounds, memories, lived experience, and identity | Who feels connected to the village, and why? | Do the residents of Tar perceive themselves as part of the place or merely as inhabitants? |
| Process | Everyday interaction and experience with space, perception, and meaning-making | How do individuals live and interact within the spatial environment? | Do social spaces in Tar still serve as places of being, seeing, and being seen, or have they lost their function? |
| Place | Physical, natural, historical, and spatial characteristics of the environment | Which physical elements foster or weaken identity and attachment? | What roles do gardens, historical fabric, and recent physical developments play in shaping Tar's identity? |





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Accordingly, in the analysis of Tar Village, the three dimensions were operationalized as follows (Table 2): This framework serves as the analytical foundation for the "Findings and Case Study Analysis" section, enabling a systematic examination of how physical developments introduced through the Tarh-e Hadi plan have influenced the sense of place and place attachment in Tar Village.

Table 2. Adaptation of the Place Attachment Model to Field Evidence from Tar Village. Source: Authors.

| Dimension | Observable Indicators in the Field | Examples from Tar Village |
|---|---|---|
| Person | Memory, population continuity, storytelling about the past | Continued connection of garden-owning families with their orchards |
| Process | Degree of daily social interaction and formation of communal spaces | Presence and movement within garden alleys and semi-public spaces |
| Place | Physical quality, harmony with natural and historical context | Strong contrast between the lower garden area and the new upper development |

## Case Study: Tar Village

In the process of planning for the sustainable development of Iranian villages, attention to place-making and heritage elements is one of the fundamental pillars for shaping local identity. However, in many Tarh-e Hadi (rural master) plans, the natural, cultural, and historical characteristics of the environment have been overlooked often leading to a weakening of the sense of place and a diminished sense of belonging among residents toward their living environment.

Tar Village, located on the southern slopes of the Karkas Mountain Range, serves as a clear example of a settlement whose spatial structure and social identity have been influenced over time by the interaction of natural, historical, and recent physical development factors. The village's broad natural landscape, gardens, springs, a historic fire temple, and the shrine of Baba Abdullah act as identity-generating elements that have the potential to strengthen both the sense of place and place attachment. Nevertheless, the implementation of Tarh-e Hadi plans and the emergence of new, uncoordinated constructions, especially in the upper section of the village, have led to spatial and social disconnection between different parts of the settlement. From a spatial organization perspective, the village can be divided into three main sections:

• Lower Section: This area includes gardens and agricultural lands along the riverbank. Although much of the land ownership belongs to non-resident families, permanent residents are typically low-income caretakers responsible for maintaining the gardens.

• Middle Section: This part encompasses the historic core and religious and service spaces. Despite their historical and social value, these areas have been neglected in recent development plans and remain inactive and underutilized.

Fig. 2. Spaces with potential for social interaction in the historic core, currently abandoned and unused.

• Upper Section: This is where most of the permanent residents of today's Tar Village live. Construction in this section has been carried out individually and inconsistently, reflecting the economic and social disparities among inhabitants. These inconsistencies are particularly evident in building facades and street designs.

Fig. 3. Variations in building styles and street patterns in the upper section of Tar Village, demonstrating physical fragmentation and failure to meet the objectives of the Tarh-e Hadi plan.

Overall, both the physical and social analyses of the village indicate that the Tarh-e Hadi plan has not succeeded in promoting spatial cohesion or strengthening place identity. In the lower section, the integration of gardens, nature, and everyday lived experience fosters a stronger sense of belonging;

Whereas in the upper section, the uncoordinated and heterogeneous constructions have diminished the sense of place and disrupted the continuity of the village's identity structure.

### • Spatial structure and settlement organization

Based on field observations, the spatial structure of Tar Village can be divided into three primary zones, each with distinct physical and social characteristics that influence residents' sense of place and belonging (Table 3).



Fig. 2. Spaces with the potential to foster social interaction and local identity, yet left abandoned within the historic building area. Photo: Saba Mirzahossein, Spring 2025.



Fig. 3. Physical disparities and lack of cohesion in building and street design reflect the neglect of the Tarh-e Hadi plan and the emergence of personalized, uncoordinated architecture rooted in residents' socioeconomic differences. Photos: Saba Mirzahossein, Spring 2025.



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Table 3. Analysis of Spatial Zones of Tar Village and Their Potential for Fostering Place Attachment. Source: Authors.

| Spatial Zone | Characteristics | Identity and Place Attachment Implications |
|---|---|---|
| Lower Section (Garden Periphery) | Organic pathways, active gardens, livelihood dependence, and memory continuity | Strong attachment due to daily interaction with nature and lived history |
| Middle Section (Historic Core and Cultural Elements) | Fire temple, shrine, and abandoned public spaces | High potential for attachment, but requires functional revitalization |
| Upper Section (New Constructions) | Diverse architecture, heterogeneous materials, and fragmented street networks | Weak attachment caused by physical discontinuity and diminished social interactions |

### • The tarh-e hadi (rural master plan) of Tar village

The Tarh-e Hadi serves as a strategic framework for organizing the physical structure and guiding the future development of rural settlements. It is formulated based on social, economic, environmental, and physical studies to define land-use patterns, improve road networks, upgrade housing conditions, and provide public services (Azizpour & Hosseini Hasel, 2008). Within this framework, the evaluation criteria for Tarh-e Hadi plans are generally categorized into four main areas: housing, road networks, land use, and environmental health.

In the case of Tar Village, the physical expansion proposed by the Tarh-e Hadi plan was primarily concentrated in the upper section of the village an area characterized by steep slopes, higher elevation, and limited accessibility, all of which create environmental and livelihood challenges. These environmental and livelihood constraints have led to the formation of a structurally unstable fabric and an area that has been largely abandoned by residents (Fig. 6 and 7). However, the strongest identity bonds and sense of belonging among residents are rooted in the lower section, where the gardens and agricultural lands form the core of their daily life and cultural memory.

Furthermore, the majority of the physical interventions implemented under the plan did not aim to strengthen social spaces or cultural elements. Instead, they were largely limited to surface-level improvements, such as paving streets and minor pathway adjustments within the historic and religious core without incorporating strategies for revitalizing or activating the social functions of these areas (Fig. 4).

As a result, rather than reinforcing place identity, the Tarh-e Hadi plan has, in certain areas, intensified spatial fragmentation and exacerbated the divide between the lower and upper sections of the village. The newer parts of Tar now function as isolated extensions, disconnected from the historical and natural fabric of the village in terms of form, materials, spatial hierarchy, and social interactions (Revised Tarh-e Hadi Plan of Tar Village. Consultant: Mohammad Nasir Khosravi, 2015).

Based on field observations, it can be concluded that the Tarh-e Hadi plan's failure to consider local needs, the social structure, and the climatic conditions of the village is one of the main factors contributing to the disruption of place identity and the decline in the sense of belonging within the newly developed areas of the village (Fig. 5).

To assess the effectiveness of the Tarh-e Hadi plan, each of its key indicators was evaluated qualitatively ranging from weak to favorable based on the authors' field observations (Tables 4, 5, 6, 7).

## Findings and Discussion: Examining the "Placeness" of Tar Village

Tar Village possesses distinctive historical, natural, spiritual, and cultural elements that collectively affirm its



Fig. 4. The upper section of the village developed under the Tarh-e Hadi plan, where attention was focused solely on paving pathways without consideration for residents' actual needs, permanent occupancy, or the structural stability of buildings. Photo: Saba Mirzahossein, Spring 2025.

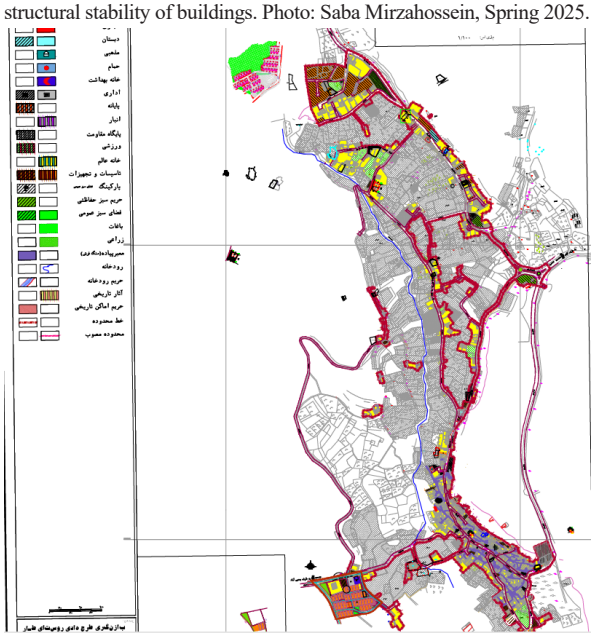


Fig. 5. Revised Tarh-e Hadi Plan of Tar Village. Consultant: Mohammad Nasir Khosravi, 2015.



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Table 4. Effectiveness of the Tarh-e Hadi Plan in the Housing Sector. Source: Authors.

| Housing Indicators | Level of Effectiveness | Field Evidence / Observation |
|---|---|---|
| Increase in Building Density | Weak | Outmigration of residents has eliminated the need for increased density, resulting in an abandoned and sparsely populated built fabric (Fig. 5). |
| Reinforcement of Rural Housing Structures | Weak | Structural inconsistency and contrast observed:<br>– No reinforcement needed in the lower section due to the presence of a living, green fabric of gardens.<br>– In the upper section, some structures have been built with minimal resistance and limited budgets, and in some cases, not in accordance with the Tarh-e Hadi plan (Fig. 7). |
| Transformation of Rural Construction Patterns | Weak | Lack of new construction has led to the absence of any transformation in building typology. |
| Compliance with Building Regulations | Favorable | Some newly built houses show efforts toward structural reinforcement and adherence to construction standards. |
| Increase in Household Density | Weak | Weak sense of belonging and outmigration of residents have prevented any growth in household density. |

Table 5. Effectiveness of the Tarh-e Hadi Plan in the Road Network Sector. Source: Authors

| Road Network Indicators | Level of Effectiveness | Field Evidence / Observation |
|---|---|---|
| Ease of Movement for Residents | Upper Section: Poor<br>Lower Section: Strong | Most of the pathways in the upper section were unpaved and steep, whereas the lower section was asphalted, providing easier movement and accessibility. |
| Quality of Newly Constructed Roads | Upper Section: Poor<br>Lower Section: Favorable | Upper-section paths have been constructed arbitrarily, while the lower section features more cohesive and better-quality paving. |
| Surface Quality of Roads | Upper Section: Poor<br>Lower Section: Strong | Upper-section paths remain unpaved; lower-section roads are asphalted. |
| Accessibility to Main Roads | Favorable | Pathways follow clear and legible access routes. |
| Compliance with Technical Standards (Slope, etc.) | Favorable | The slope issue has been addressed appropriately given the village's topography. |
| Hierarchy of Roads | Favorable | Collective and public spaces have appropriately defined access routes. |
| Aesthetic Improvement of Roads | Weak | Poorly designed street furniture and lack of visual coherence. |

Table 6. Effectiveness of the Tarh-e Hadi Plan in the Land Use Sector. Source: Authors

| Land Use Indicators | Level of Effectiveness | Field Evidence / Observation |
|---|---|---|
| Logical Balance Between Population and Public Facilities | Weak | Lack of sufficient amenities and public services has led to the migration of the village's younger population. |
| Consideration of Valuable Historical and Cultural Fabric | Weak | Inadequate design and planning around key heritage sites such as the shrine (Imamzadeh) and the fire temple, which could otherwise enhance collective memory and social belonging. |
| Appropriateness of Development Forecasts | Poor | The Tarh-e Hadi plan concentrated expansion in residential areas particularly the upper section despite difficult terrain and limited accessibility. |

Table 7. Effectiveness of the Tarh-e Hadi Plan in the Environmental Health Sector. Source: Authors

| Environmental Health Indicators | Level of Effectiveness | Field Evidence / Observation |
|---|---|---|
| Creation of Green Spaces | Poor | – Absence of green spaces in the upper section due to its geographical position and location within the colder zone of the village.<br>– In the lower section, the organic and natural spatial form has been preserved thanks to the presence of gardens and low boundary walls. |
| Surface Water Drainage and Management | Poor | – Lack of proper drainage channels or caniveaux for directing and discharging surface water.<br>– In the upper section, pathways have been arbitrarily and irregularly designed, constructed without adherence to the Tarh-e Hadi plan. |
| Quality of Waste Collection | Favorable | – Presence of waste bins within the village area and at its main entrance. |


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Fig. 6. Most buildings in the upper section consist of unstable, uninhabited structures. Photo: Saba Mirzahossein, Spring 2025.



Fig. 7. Due to the lack of governmental oversight, buildings are constructed based on individual preferences and available budgets, often resulting in structurally unstable fabrics. Photo: Saba Mirzahossein, Spring 2025.

strong sense of placeness. Based on field observations, the lower section of the village is characterized by dense orchards and organically formed pathways that follow the original garden divisions. Despite recent interventions such as the asphalting of pathways, which has in some cases lowered garden entrances below street level the traditional spatial fabric has remained intact.

The orchards, through their close association with villagers' livelihoods and their role in collective memory, function as natural place-making elements. Thus, the placeness of Tar can be understood as being fundamentally rooted in its orchards and geographic setting.

In addition to the gardens, several other key elements play a significant role in shaping the cultural and social identity of Tar:

1. Chik-Chik Spring:

This natural water source plays a vital role in providing both drinking and irrigation water for villagers. Located among Tar's farmlands, the spring reflects the importance of natural resources in shaping the village's social and economic identity.

2. Tar Fire Temple:

One of the most prominent historical structures in the village, this pre-Islamic fire temple holds great importance in Tar's architectural, cultural, and religious heritage. It serves as a tangible link between the community and its ancient past.

3. Shrine of Baba Abdullah:

This religious monument stands as both a spiritual and historical landmark in the village. Its proximity to other cultural elements reinforces the sense of place and spiritual attachment among residents.

4. Traditional Houses and Garden Alleys:

The old residential structures and narrow kooche-bagh pathways are key cultural and social spaces that not only contribute to the village's aesthetic identity but also sustain daily interactions and community cohesion.

5. Karkas Mountain Range and Natural Landscape:

The surrounding Karkas Mountains provide Tar with a unique visual and environmental character. This natural backdrop enhances both the scenic beauty and the emotional bond residents have with their environment, strengthening the overall place identity of the village.

Despite the physical and social disruptions caused by recent developments, these elements continue to function as core place-making components that sustain the sense of identity and belonging within Tar Village (Table 8).

Table 8. Analysis of the Placeness of Tar Village. Source: Authors

| Element | Role in Shaping Identity | Cultural–Social Outcome |
|---|---|---|
| Orchards and Irrigation System | Integration of livelihood, life, and nature | Most enduring root of place attachment |
| Chik-Chik Spring | Vital and memory-laden natural source | Strengthening of collective memory |
| Fire Temple and Shrine of Baba Abdullah | Historical and spiritual symbols | Formation of shared cultural identity |
| Garden Alleys (Kooche-Bagh) | Everyday social spaces | Facilitating face-to-face interaction |
| Karkas Mountain Range | Symbolic and geographical landscape | Enhancement of spatial perception and sense of orientation |

## • Place dimension: the relationship Between physical form and nature in shaping identity

In the lower section of the village, the gardens and agricultural lands are naturally integrated with the topography and water resources of the area. This interconnection between the physical setting, natural environment, and way of life has fostered a strong sense of local identity and deep attachment to place. Residents of this area, through the continuity of agricultural activities and their constant presence within the natural landscape, perceive the place as an inseparable part of their daily lives and collective memory (Fig. 8).

However, in the upper section, due to its higher elevation, limited infrastructure, and uncoordinated, individually designed constructions, physical development has diverged from the natural environment, leading to





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Fig. 8. Design of pathways and walls aligned with the natural terrain using local materials, preserving the village's fabric and identity. Photo: Saba Mirzahossein, Spring 2025.

identity fragmentation and a decline in the sense of belonging (Table 9).

Conclusion: Wherever the physical environment, nature, and everyday life are interconnected, the sense of place remains strong; conversely, wherever physical development is incompatible with the natural and social context, the sense of place becomes weakened.

### • Process dimension: the role of social relationships in shaping place attachment

In the traditional fabric of the village, garden alleys (kooche-bagh) and semi-public spaces served as settings for face-to-face interactions and family relations. These spaces fostered collective memory and a shared sense of "we-ness."

In contrast, within the newly developed areas, fragmented spatial patterns and the absence of communal spaces have reduced opportunities for everyday interaction and increased social distance.

Quote from a resident:

"We were always together; the children played in the garden alleys. But now, there's no more closeness no real neighbors anymore."

Conclusion: Social relationships play the most significant role in sustaining a sense of belonging, yet new architectural patterns have undermined this social foundation.

### • Person dimension: lived experience and place memory

The place identity of the lower section is deeply rooted in shared experiences and collective memory accumulated over generations. In contrast, the upper section, characterized by new, discontinuous constructions with no historical or communal background, lacks a cohesive sense of identity and belonging further reinforcing the tendency toward migration among residents.

Table 9. Relationship Between Physical Structure and the Natural Environment. Source: Authors.

| Dimension | Indicator | Analysis in Tar Village |
|---|---|---|
| Place | Natural and historical elements | Gardens + Spring + Fire Temple = Place-making and identity-generating components |
| Person | Memory, oral history | Lower section → strong attachment; Upper section → identity discontinuity |
| Process | Social interactions | Central area and gardens → vibrant interactions; Upper section → isolation and outmigration |

### • Summary of findings: neglect of place in rural planning

Field observations indicate that the upper section of Tar Village, despite being included in the Tarh-e Hadi plan, has developed spontaneously and arbitrarily, lacking a planning framework grounded in the local, cultural, and environmental context. This type of development, formed without consideration for the human–environment relationship or the lifeworld structure of residents, has caused a rupture across the three main dimensions of place attachment (Table 10).

Table 10. Analysis of Place Attachment in the Upper Section of Tar Village. Source: Authors.

| Dimension | Outcome in the Upper Section | Result |
|---|---|---|
| Place | Lack of harmony with the natural and physical setting | Decline in spatial perception and identity quality |
| Process | Reduced daily interactions and weakened communal spaces | Erosion of social ties and collective memory |
| Person | Absence of shared lived experience | Lack of attachment and increased tendency toward migration |

## Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that physical developments in Tar Village, particularly in the upper section, have been implemented without adequate consideration of the village's natural, historical, and social context. This lack of contextual awareness has led to a weakening of place identity and a decline in residents' sense of belonging.

According to the Scannell and Gifford (2010) tripartite model, place attachment is strengthened when the three dimensions Place (physical and natural characteristics), Process (daily interactions), and Person (collective memory and lived experience) exist in continuity and coherence with one another. In Tar Village, this integration is preserved primarily in the lower sections and the historic core, where gardens, springs, garden alleys, and cultural landmarks such as the Fire Temple and the Shrine of Baba Abdullah remain active and meaningful, continuing to shape local identity and collective memory.



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In contrast, the new developments in the upper section, characterized by heterogeneous architecture, lack of spatial cohesion, weak communal spaces, and disconnection from the natural landscape, have failed to foster a shared lived experience or stable social relationships. Consequently, the sense of belonging in these areas is significantly weaker.

This situation demonstrates that physical planning devoid of social and cultural dimensions not only fails to enhance the quality of rural living but may also lead to identity fragmentation and an increased tendency toward migration.

Therefore, it can be concluded that sustainable rural development is achievable only when physical planning aligns with place identity and residents' way of life. In other words, place must serve as the starting point of planning, not its byproduct.

## Practical Recommendations

To strengthen place attachment and ensure sustainable physical development in Tar Village, the following actions are recommended:

1. Revitalize the historic core and communal spaces through functional activation, rather than mere paving or aesthetic enhancement.
2. Preserve and reinforce the linkage between the gardens and residential areas, as they represent the most significant source of local identity and collective memory.
3. Develop construction guidelines that harmonize with the natural topography and utilize local materials, particularly in the upper section.
4. Involve residents in the decision-making process of the Tarh-e Hadi plan to prevent rootless, context-insensitive development.
5. Revise the Tarh-e Hadi plan with emphasis on the three dimensions of place attachment:

- Place (nature + physical setting)
- Process (social interactions)
- Person (identity and memory)

In summary, recognizing placeness as a fundamental principle in rural physical planning especially within Tarh-e Hadi projects is essential. Any development undertaken without a thorough understanding of the context of a place not only fails to improve the quality of life but also contributes to identity disintegration and a decline in social interaction.

## Conflict of Interest

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

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