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Original Research Article

An Assessment of Development Outcomes from the Perspective of Structural Logic and Internal Dynamics of Development Programs (Case Study: Camp B, Bandar Imam Khomeini)*

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, development has become a central theme in urban and regional policymaking, often pursued with the intention of improving the quality of life, reducing spatial inequalities, and strengthening infrastructure in underprivileged areas. However, the outcomes of many development programs particularly in peripheral settlements highlight a significant gap between stated goals and actual results. This study critically examines the conceptual structure and internal logic of development planning in Iran, focusing on Camp B in Bandar Imam Khomeini as a case that reflects these dynamics. This study employed a qualitative, interpretive case study approach and combined documentary analysis of official development programs with field observations in Camp B to identify several structural and conceptual weaknesses in current development strategies including lack of strategic coherence, limited flexibility, exclusion of community participation, absence of spatial and social justice, weak institutional and policy frameworks, overemphasis on economic growth, and insufficient attention to human services and basic infrastructure. These issues were then compared with the lived and social realities of the settlement. Findings indicate that the ongoing crises in Camp B are not merely the result of poor implementation but rather reflect the inherent flaws embedded in the logic of development programs themselves. In other words, the shortcomings in this case illustrate a broader structural problem that permeates development planning. The study argues that genuine and sustainable development requires a rethinking of these foundations, moving beyond top-down approaches toward context-based, participatory, and justice-oriented planning.

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Introduction

In contemporary scholarship, the concept of development is often regarded as complex, multidimensional, and somewhat ambiguous. Over the past few decades, it has become one of the central theoretical frameworks in urban and regional planning. In many transitional countries, development is presented as a strategy to improve the quality of life, upgrade infrastructure, and reduce spatial and social inequalities. Yet, practical experiences in target regions demonstrate that achieving these goals is neither straightforward nor linear. In many cases, a considerable gap emerges between the declared objectives of development programs and the actual socio-economic and spatial conditions. This disjuncture highlights the need for a critical re-examination of prevailing approaches and processes. Such challenges are particularly visible in programs designed and implemented in a top-down manner, often without the active participation of local communities.

Within this context, a specific form of intervention, known in Iran as sectoral development (tose'e-bakhshi), has acquired a prominent role in national planning. This approach is typically derived from sector-based objectives and macro-level logics at the national and provincial scale, and then imposed on local areas frequently without establishing meaningful connections to local needs and contexts.

The experience of Camp B in Bandar Imam Khomeini offers an instructive example of the consequences of such an approach. Originally established as temporary housing for petrochemical workers, the settlement expanded following successive waves of migration, eventually becoming one of the most populous neighborhoods of Sarbandar. Today, it faces multiple challenges ranging from inadequate infrastructure and unresolved land ownership issues to weak public services and declining social cohesion and community capital. These realities raise pressing questions for planners and policymakers:

• Why have development programs, despite their stated aim of improving living conditions in areas such as Camp B, often resulted instead in heightened deprivation, instability, and social crises?

• Should the causes of these shortcomings be sought mainly in weak program implementation, institutional obstacles, and socio-economic barriers?

• Or do the roots of failure also lie deeper, within the conceptual and structural logics of development planning itself?

This study addresses these questions by focusing on Camp B as a case through which to explore the relationship between development policies and their local outcomes. Drawing on both field-based analysis of the neighborhood and a review of relevant planning documents, the research seeks to provide a clearer understanding of how development strategies shape local realities. Such a re-reading of the development–outcome nexus may open pathways toward rethinking dominant planning practices, paving the way for context-sensitive, participatory, and community-oriented alternatives.

It is important to note that the term development is used here in two senses: first, in reference to the official titles of urban and regional planning documents (such as the National Spatial Plan, Comprehensive Plan, or Detailed Plan) where the word explicitly appears; and second, in the broader sense of urban planning processes. This usage does not imply uncritical acceptance of the Western, linear model of development. As some scholars have suggested, in many contexts, the term progress might serve as a more appropriate alternative, avoiding the reduction of the concept to a singular Western paradigm. In this article, however, the term development is retained primarily to remain faithful to the terminology of official planning documents and to the dominant discourse within Iranian planning literature.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach in the form of an interpretive case study. The informal settlement known as Camp B in Bandar Imam Khomeini was selected as the research case because it provides a clear reflection of the local consequences of national and regional development policies. Data collection combined two main methods: document analysis and field observation. First, a set of official development documents related to Khuzestan Province including urban development plans, macro-level programs, and national spatial planning frameworks was examined using qualitative content analysis. This step made it possible to identify structural weaknesses and conceptual gaps embedded in the logic of these programs. In the next stage, field data were collected through direct observation of the physical environment, social conditions, and public services in Camp B, complemented by secondary information sources. During the analysis phase, findings from both streams of data were compared and interpreted in relation to one another. This comparative process revealed how the dominant model of development planning corresponds with, and often diverges from, the lived socio-spatial realities of the settlement. Overall, this methodology allowed for a critical assessment of official planning frameworks and their real-life implications for residents in marginalized neighborhoods.

Theoretical Framework

• Development; Historical Evolution, Conceptual Dimensions, and Structural Challenges

The concept of development stands as one of the most fundamental yet contested ideas in the social sciences and policy studies. It has been interpreted from diverse theoretical, cultural, and political perspectives. From its Latin roots, the term carries a qualitative meaning associated with unfolding, evolution, or realization in contrast to growth, which denotes quantitative expansion. For this reason, in scholarly discourse, development is not considered equivalent to economic growth but rather a multidimensional process that emphasizes quality of life, social justice, and cultural vitality (Azkia & Ghafari, 2014, 24).

Development is therefore understood as a comprehensive and interwoven process of economic, social, cultural, and political transformation aimed at improving living conditions, strengthening public participation, and ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities (Attefed & Barry, 1992, 94) (Fig. 1). Crucially, this process must encompass society as a whole, particularly marginalized and low-income groups, and should not be designed to privilege a specific elite (Mehdipour, 1998, 23). At the same time, the meaning and applications of development are never fixed but evolve across historical and cultural contexts, reflecting the changing dynamics of societies (Taqipour Akhtari & Alipour Tabrizi, 2023). Within this perspective, development is viewed as a dynamic, multi-layered, and multi-scalar process closely tied to economic growth (Moren, 2003) but inherently social and complex, requiring context-sensitive, institutional, and human-centered analysis (Rabie, 2016, 19). This multidimensional approach shifts development beyond the narrow lens of economic performance, situating it at the heart of debates on justice, participation, and the construction of social meaning.

In contemporary policy and planning literature, the concept of development is both multifaceted and dynamic, having undergone significant transformations over time. From the mid-twentieth century, particularly after World War II, development emerged as a central pillar in efforts to improve the economic, social, and spatial conditions of societies. Initially, it was equated with economic growth, industrialization, and modernization; however, over time, accumulated experiences and theoretical critiques broadened this definition to include human, cultural, environmental, and social dimensions (Todaro & Smith, 2009). Fundamentally, development is a political concept, emphasizing political and economic aspects. Its civilizational dimension has been associated with exerting influence over developing countries (Apter, 1967). Nonetheless, the conceptual roots of development can be traced back to the nineteenth century within the context of colonialism. By the twentieth century, development increasingly became a vehicle for promoting consumerism and facilitating the entry of Western goods into peripheral nations, while simultaneously, the overexploitation of natural resources led to environmental degradation and weakened social structures (Mansouri, 2025). Considering the historical background and the conceptual evolution of development, today in the global development literature, three fundamental definitions of this concept can be identified: 1. Development as a long-term process of structural-social transformation, emphasizing fundamental changes in social, economic, and institutional structures; in this view, development is considered a gradual historical trajectory accompanied by changes in deep social structures (Rist, 2001). 2. Development as a medium-term outcome, focusing on achieving specific goals through regional planning and the establishment of performance indicators (Almeida, 1994). 3. Development as a dominant discourse of Western modernity, in which development is not merely an economic project but a socio-cultural concept; this perspective, by critically addressing the negative consequences of classical development approaches, emphasizes a balance among economic, social, and environmental dimensions, from which sustainable development, social development, political development, and other modern forms of development have emerged (Veiga, 2005). These three approaches indicate that development is neither a one-dimensional nor a static concept, but rather, in a dialectical process shaped by historical, social, political, and economic contexts, it leads to the reproduction of various forms of development, including sustainable, social, political, economic, and tourism development.

In Iran, development-oriented policymaking has been a continuous feature from the Reza Shah era to the present, mainly implemented through infrastructure projects and five-year plans. Although developed under various political administrations, these programs often share structural similarities, including a technical, top-down approach with limited attention to social, cultural, and

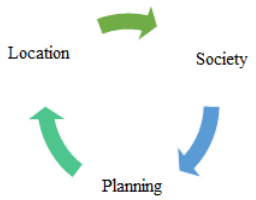

Fig. 1. Core Components of the Definition of Development. Source: Authors.

participatory dimensions. At the local level, this approach has frequently produced contradictory, unstable, or even counterproductive outcomes. Maghsoudi (2019) notes that urban development policies across different periods have relied on unilateral strategies with minimal community engagement, largely due to the absence of democratic institutions.

Development, at its core, seeks equitable distribution of resources and enhancement of human rights (Antoniades et al., 2021), and its global focus today remains on economic growth and social justice. Nevertheless, experience demonstrates that development cannot be applied as a single, uniform solution across all regions. Each area possesses unique characteristics, capacities, and local conditions, and neglecting these factors undermines the effectiveness of development programs. Place-based development emphasizes that planning must be tailored to the social, cultural, and spatial context of each region rather than relying on standardized models. For example, field research in villages in Kuhdasht (Sabokro et al., 2024) demonstrates that sustainable and effective development is achievable only by leveraging local capacities. Such development emerges organically from the genuine needs of residents rather than being imposed from above. Historically, however, many development initiatives including those in Iran have been framed as standardized, urban-centered, and industrially-focused programs. These approaches have transformed local landscapes and sometimes created narratives that diverge from the lived experiences of local communities (Mokhles & Jafari, 2024).

The primary goals of development include economic growth, poverty reduction, strengthening the local economy, and promoting sustainability. Urban development is often implemented through local development strategies to align national policies on economic growth and poverty alleviation. These strategies emphasize competitiveness, sustainable growth, job creation, and social inclusion, and are generally based on participatory approaches (Behzadfar & Ziari, 2023) (Fig. 2).

Based on Fig. 2 and the principles of sustainable development, achieving meaningful progress requires a comprehensive and continuous process that strengthens the "capacities of communities" to meet both material and spiritual needs while maintaining balance among the components of local residential systems (Khoshfar et al., 2014). Focusing exclusively on individual economic, social, physical, or environmental aspects without recognizing their interconnections cannot result in truly sustainable urban development. As a complex and dynamic system, a city can only achieve sustainability when its elements interact effectively with one another and with the surrounding environment. Consequently, adopting a holistic and systemic approach in urban policy and planning is increasingly crucial.

In response to the adverse outcomes of uneven development, Western discourse since the mid-20th century has sought to redefine the concept of development. These efforts led to the emergence of "sustainable development," emphasizing environmental stewardship, intergenerational equity, and attention to cultural and social dimensions. A common approach is the "sectoral development" model, which separates specialized sectors such as agriculture, industry, transportation, and services, each managed by independent institutions. While this model may succeed within individual sectors, it often falls short in addressing complex, multidimensional challenges due to its lack of holistic perspective and territorial coherence (Friedmann, 1992). In some instances, projects deemed successful under this framework inadvertently create inequalities and new challenges by overlooking social and environmental considerations.

Another viewpoint conceptualizes development as a form of "authoritarian intervention," wherein planning occurs without genuine local participation and relies on predetermined indicators. Scott (2020), in Seeing Like a State, demonstrates how governments that disregard local contexts and the complexities of everyday life often implement projects that not only fail but also generate crises and public dissatisfaction. He attributes the failure of many such initiatives to oversimplification and neglect of local realities. Although recent decades have seen attempts to address these shortcomings through social, cultural, and environmental frameworks, the fragmented and instrumental nature of these policies has often limited

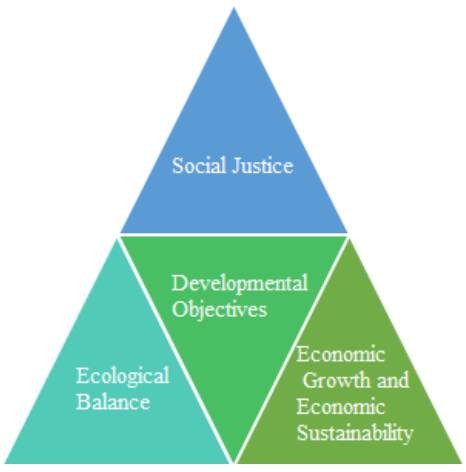

Fig. 2. Objectives of Place-Based Development. Source: Authors.

their practical effectiveness. In recent decades, cities have become central hubs of growth, yet they simultaneously face significant development challenges (Sivaev, 2015). Evaluations of development projects focused solely on tangible outcomes reveal their inability to adequately meet human needs and enhance well-being. A contemporary understanding of development must encompass not only physical aspects but also human perception and experience, as quality of life emerges from the interaction between tangible and experiential dimensions of space. Therefore, development approaches that prioritize an integrated understanding of local context and place-based considerations are both essential and unavoidable.

• Structural Critique of Development Programs in Khuzestan Province

Although development programs in Khuzestan Province appear diverse and multidimensional in official documents, content analysis reveals that they suffer from fundamental structural weaknesses. These deficiencies are embedded throughout the design, implementation, and underlying logic of the programs, which not only hinder the achievement of development objectives but, in some cases, contribute to the reproduction of social and spatial issues. Reviewing twelve major development programs presented in official documents provides a suitable framework to identify these challenges.

First, in urban planning, the experience of Bandar Imam Khomeini (RA) illustrates a structural incapacity to respond to crises. For instance, the detailed plan approved in 2013 lost its effectiveness following the extensive floods of 2020, prompting the Housing Foundation to propose replacement measures for neighborhoods at risk. This demonstrates that rigid, inflexible planning frameworks cannot adequately respond to sudden and unpredictable changes. Additionally, the lack of effective financial and economic attachments and the absence of implementation prioritization further undermine these programs' effectiveness (Islamic Architecture Center, 2023).

This structural weakness is even more pronounced in programs addressing informal settlements. These initiatives often emphasize physical interventions such as housing construction or street improvements without adequate consideration of livelihoods, social structures, and cultural contexts. Such a top-down, one-dimensional approach not only fails to improve conditions but also, by ignoring social fabrics, fosters alienation, hidden homelessness, and the displacement of social problems in new forms. Similar critiques apply to macro-level territorial and economic policies. Although official development documents articulate ambitious goals, such as reducing inequality, preserving natural resources, and improving infrastructure, they often lack actionable strategies, measurable indicators, and prioritization mechanisms. This absence of practical frameworks leaves many policies at the level of rhetoric, creating a significant gap between what is written and what is implemented (Plan and Budget Organization, 2019).

The situation is further exacerbated by the dominant reliance on the private sector in areas like agriculture, industry, and services. Without structural support from the state and public institutions, the main burden of development falls on investors, who often avoid engaging in underprivileged areas. Rather than promoting equitable opportunities and spatial balance, this approach deepens regional disparities and reproduces inequality. A clear example is the provincial agricultural development program, which relied on natural resources such as water and soil but insufficiently considered climate crises, soil salinity, and environmental degradation, leading to unsustainable exploitation and ecological instability contradicting long-term development objectives. These structural weaknesses also affect the institutional dimensions of development programs. Plans aiming at institutional decentralization or the creation of financial mechanisms, such as development banks or stock initiatives, have often resulted in greater resource centralization within official institutions due to the lack of accountability and public participation. This centralization has widened the gap between the state and society, excluding active citizen involvement from the development process. Similarly, higher-level frameworks, such as the Provincial Spatial Planning Document, despite goals like optimizing investment allocation or reducing unemployment, lack mechanisms to ensure equitable resource distribution or meaningful social participation. Emphasis on projects such as seaport development, primarily designed to serve commercial interests while neglecting social benefits, has led to the privatization of natural public spaces, restricting local communities' access. Finally, historical deficiencies in public service provision including education, healthcare, and socio-cultural services illustrate a pattern of unsustainable and inequitable development. Statistics indicate that the spatial distribution of these services in Khuzestan is below the national average, highlighting the imbalance between industrial growth and human development. Overall, a critical review of these programs reveals a set of key structural factors, including a lack of strategic coherence, insufficient flexibility and adaptability, social non-participation, neglect of spatial and social justice, weak institutional capacity, and the dominance of economic and technocratic rationality

across policy layers. These factors will serve as analytical criteria in the subsequent evaluation of Camp B in Bandar Imam Khomeini, to examine how such structural challenges manifest at the local level (Table 1).

Camp B; Local-Scale Reflection of Sectoral Development Logic

Camp B (Shahid Sabbaghan Town), spanning roughly 40 hectares in the southwest of Bandar Imam Khomeini (RA), stands as a prominent example of settlements shaped by sectoral and top-down development approaches in contemporary Iran (Fig. 3). This neighborhood illustrates not only the physical and spatial impacts of such interventions but also vividly demonstrates the social and institutional consequences of planning practices that neglect human-centered considerations.

The establishment of this settlement began with labor migrations in the 1970s (1350s in the Iranian calendar). The first groups of Iranian and Japanese workers settled here around 1973 (1352), coinciding with the launch of port facilities in the vicinity (Fig. 4). At that time, Sarbandar was largely undeveloped, and this area became the first human settlement surrounding the port (Fig. 5). As port and petrochemical activities expanded, workers' housing gradually shifted further inland, about 15 kilometers from the port. Subsequent major migration waves in the 1980s and 1990s—one driven by war and the other by economic factors—transformed Camp B into a focal point for incoming migrants and, over time, into a historical-social center within the city (Plan and Budget Organization, 2018; National Statistics Center, 2006). Despite its historical origins, Camp B has, over recent decades, become one of the most disadvantaged and challenging urban neighborhoods in the country. Ambiguous land ownership and the lack of formal recognition in urban planning documents have deprived residents of basic urban, legal, and infrastructural services. An analysis of policymaking and administrative practices over the past fifty years suggests that this neighborhood has often been treated not as a human settlement but primarily as temporary housing and a tool for economic exploitation, particularly by the petrochemical industry. In this context, a utilitarian and subordinate relationship has emerged between the development framework and the residents, where organizational and property interests take precedence over human welfare, marginalizing residents' agency and subjectivity.

In recent years, the Housing Foundation has undertaken efforts to renovate the area; however, these interventions have largely followed the same top-down approach, with minimal genuine participation from residents. Demolition of traditional huts, allocation of replacement plots, and construction of standardized, low-quality housing have not improved living conditions. Instead, these measures have produced spaces that are more vulnerable, unstable, and socially fragmented. The new houses, due to their unfinished state, structural deficiencies, and lack of infrastructure, are neither permanent nor adaptable. As a result, residents remain in a liminal state, caught between a past from which they are disconnected and a future yet to arrive—what can be described as a "permanent temporary life," a striking example of the failure of authoritarian development at the local scale.

Based on field observations and document analysis, the challenges of Camp B can be grouped into four main categories: infrastructure, public services, human-centered issues, and housing. These categories not only reflect the neighborhood's physical and social conditions but also illustrate the direct consequences of structural weaknesses in development policy (Fig. 6).

• Infrastructure

The urban infrastructure in Camp B is critically underdeveloped. The lack of a proper sewage system has caused wastewater to flow through open channels, intensifying pollution during rainfall. Residents also face challenges due to poor-quality drinking water, incomplete gas distribution, unpaved roads, insufficient street lighting, and the absence of waste management services, all of which pose serious risks to health and well-being.

• Social and Human-Centered Issues

Although the neighborhood is ethnically diverse, this diversity has not fostered cultural enrichment. Instead,

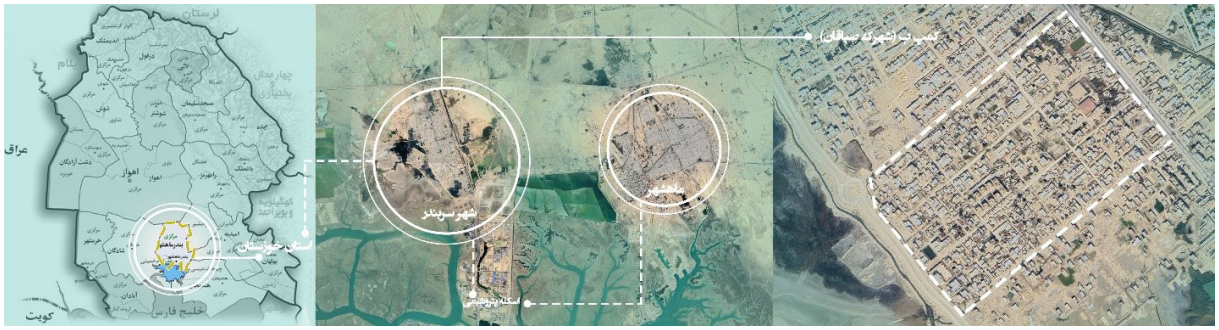

Fig. 3. Location of the Case Study. Source: Authors.

Table 1. Dimensions and Components of Weaknesses in Development Programs in Khuzestan Province. Source: Authors.

Components of weakness in development programs	Details and characteristics of each weakness
Weak strategic coherence and lack of systematic planning	A sectoral and fragmented approach instead of a holistic, territorial perspective.
	Emphasis on quantitative and technical targets without considering social and cultural contexts.
	Lack of operational prioritization and absence of realistic timelines.
	Overreliance on top-down planning approaches.
Lack of flexibility and adaptability	Inability to adapt to environmental shocks and crises (e.g., the 2020 flood).
	Planning based on assumptions of a fully predictable future, without accounting for uncertainties.
	Lack of adaptive capacity to respond to changing social and economic conditions.
Limited social participation	Absence of transparent mechanisms for local participation in decision-making and implementation processes.
	Neglect of the needs, lived experiences, and capacities of local communities.
	Project designs carried out without residents' consent or social understanding.
Absence of spatial and social equity	Unequal distribution of resources and concentration of development in affluent areas.
	Neglect of the marginalized and underprivileged regions of the province.
	Lack of consideration for spatial justice indicators in the allocation of funds.
	Externally driven development disconnected from the identity and interests of local communities.
Institutional and policy weaknesses	Generalized statements and a lack of precise operational strategies or measurable evaluation tools.
	Conflicting interests in declared objectives (economic development vs. environmental protection).
	Absence of accountability mechanisms and effectiveness assessment in implemented policies.
Excessive economic focus and technocratic orientation	Excessive emphasis on attracting private investors without clearly defining the government's role.
	Implementation of projects with a profit-driven, technical mindset, neglecting assessment of social impacts.
	Exploitation of natural resources without regard for environmental sustainability.
Deficiency of basic infrastructure and human services	Uneven development of service sectors (education, health, transportation) compared to the industrial sector.
	Lower spatial distribution of human services in the province relative to the national average.
	Neglect of welfare, cultural, healthcare, and support infrastructure.

Fig. 4. Aerial view of Sarbandar and Camp B. Source: https://sbremrouz.blogfa.com/post/14

Fig. 5. Workers' housing in Camp B. Source: https://sbremrouz.blogfa.com/post/14.

the absence of social integration policies has led to fragmentation and distrust among residents. High unemployment, lack of cultural and recreational facilities, and a pervasive sense of hopelessness have contributed to social problems such as addiction, despair, and violence.

• Public Services

Camp B suffers from severe deficits in public services. The neighborhood lacks healthcare facilities and has limited access to cultural, recreational, and green spaces. Environmental degradation, including loss of natural vegetation and poor stormwater management, has reduced residents' comfort and reinforced feelings of inequality and deprivation.

• Housing

The housing stock consists largely of semi-finished, low-quality units without formal ownership documentation. Many structures are built with inadequate materials and, in some cases, house multiple families. This creates unsafe and unstable living conditions. The absence of structural and legal security leaves residents in a constant state of uncertainty and vulnerability (Etemad et al., 2008).

• Summary

Taken together, these challenges indicate that Camp B is not merely a marginalized neighborhood but a living example of the consequences of inefficient, top-down, and context-insensitive development policies. Development in this context has not empowered residents but instead reproduced inequality and deprivation. This case study offers an important framework for understanding how sectoral, authoritarian, and physicalist development strategies operate in real human contexts. In the following sections, these structures will be examined comparatively, using the analytical criteria established in the previous chapter.

Discussion

A critical examination of the theoretical foundations of development, in connection with this study, indicates that the inefficiency of development policies in peripheral areas largely stems from top-down, sectoral, and one-dimensional approaches that neglect the social, cultural, and environmental complexities of local contexts. This approach—conceptually reflected in notions such as sectoral development, hierarchical intervention, and oversimplification of local systems—is vividly illustrated in the case of Camp B in Bandar Imam Khomeini (RA). Combining these theoretical perspectives with field observations enables the formulation of new insights, highlighting gaps between macro-level planning and local needs, the absence of social participation, institutional centralization, and spatial inequality. Key elements identified from the critical analysis of Khuzestan's development documents are discussed below in relation to the tangible challenges observed in Camp B:

• Weak Strategic Cohesion and Systematic Planning

In Camp B, the absence of a coherent vision and coordinated planning has resulted in fragmented, short-term, and disconnected interventions. Incomplete projects, dead-end streets, and housing without supporting infrastructure reflect the lack of an overarching plan and poor coordination among responsible institutions.

• Lack of Flexibility and Adaptability

The neighborhood's physical design disregards the real

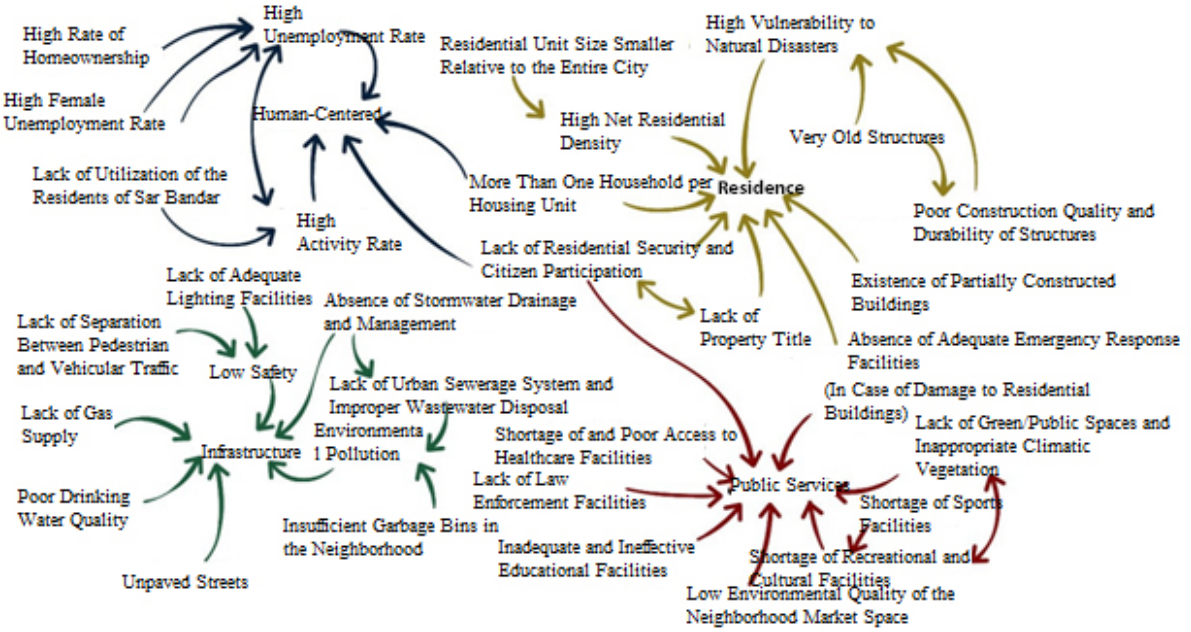

Fig. 6. Diagram of Interrelated Issues Identified in Camp B. Source: Islamic Architecture Center, Art Bureau of the Islamic Propagation Organization, 2023.

needs of residents and the social-cultural characteristics of the community. Standardized housing models, developed without consideration of lifestyle, social identity, or mixed-use requirements, have produced lifeless, inefficient, and unstable spaces.

• Social Exclusion from Participation

Residents were excluded from all stages of project planning, including design, site selection, construction, and allocation. This lack of participation has generated mistrust, a sense of detachment, and, in some cases, withdrawal from projects, reducing program effectiveness and weakening social capital.

• Spatial and Social Inequity

Camp B suffers from the lowest levels of service compared to other urban neighborhoods. Dirt roads, insufficient educational and healthcare facilities, and unequal infrastructure allocation reflect systemic inequities in urban resource distribution and reveal spatial injustice in policymaking.

• Institutional and Policy Weakness

The lack of clear accountability from municipal, housing, and land authorities regarding land ownership has left residents' rights uncertain and obstructed project implementation. This institutional disorganization is a major factor perpetuating the neighborhood's precarious conditions.

• Excessive Economic Rationality and Technocratic Focus

Housing design in Camp B has prioritized technical standardization over social and cultural needs. Spaces lack flexibility for multi-generational living, home-based economic activities, or local social interactions, producing units that function as technical constructs rather than real "homes."

• Deficient Basic Infrastructure and Human Services

Severe shortcomings in education, healthcare, green spaces, sewage, and waste collection reflect the same sectoral and imbalanced development observed in higher-level policy documents. Emphasizing construction without integrating human-centered services has significantly reduced the quality of life.

• Summary

This analysis demonstrates that Camp B is not an isolated case but a clear representation of the dominant development model in Khuzestan. Historical experience with colonial-style urban planning in the province shows that when development programs are designed solely for top-down objectives, without understanding social and cultural contexts, they fail to meet residents' essential needs. Instead, they reproduce spatial inequalities, reinforce structural domination, and create dualistic and unjust urban spaces (Zandiyeh et al., 2021). This comparison not only exposes the gap between policy texts and field realities but also highlights the deep disconnect between stated development goals and residents' lived experiences. From this perspective, the study of Camp B provides a crucial basis for critically assessing conventional planning mechanisms and emphasizes the urgent need to rethink intervention models in peripheral and informal settlements.

Conclusion

The results of this study reveal that the failures of development in neighborhoods such as Camp B in Bandar Imam Khomeini (RA) stem not merely from weak implementation or limited resources but from the conceptual and institutional foundations of development policy in Iran. Analysis of field data alongside theoretical studies shows that the dominant planning approach has been authoritarian, top-down, and physically focused, sidelining social participation, spatial equity, and cultural context. Under such a framework, development often fails to enhance living conditions and, instead, reinforces inequality, marginalization, and the erosion of social capital. A synthesis of the findingsconsidering factors such as the lack of strategic cohesion, institutional weaknesses, absence of flexibility and adaptability, limited social participation, inequitable resource distribution, excessive economic rationality, and inadequate basic services demonstrates that these shortcomings are clearly manifested in the physical, institutional, and social conditions of Camp B. Residents face semi-finished housing, minimal services, and environments marked by exclusion, providing a tangible example of the shortcomings of conventional sectoral and top-down development approaches.

In addressing the central research question, it can be concluded that development challenges in peripheral areas should be viewed not as isolated incidents but as part of a structural pattern within the country's development planning system. Until these structures are reoriented and development shifts from a centralized, physically-driven, and non-participatory model to a context-sensitive, human-centered, and participatory approach, achieving sustainable, equitable, and locally grounded development in these areas will remain unlikely.

Conflict of Interest

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

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