

Viewpoint/ Critical Review

## Protection of the Natural Landscape of a Village, and Protection of the Place-Making Index in the Development Process\*

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**Abstract** | Natural landscape refers to the human perception of nature. Rural landscape, as a type of natural landscape, reflects the most natural and meaningful way of human habitation throughout history. It is a perfect example of humans valuing the natural landscape and the mutual influence of these two landscapes is undeniable. This article attempts to examine the contribution of protecting the natural landscape of the village as a place-making factor in the process of rural development. This research is critical qualitative drawing upon a critical examination of literature in light of its theoretical foundation. The impact of the development process on the natural landscape of the villages was investigated through field observations in three villages of Kuhdasht city, including Payastan, Sorkhdom Leki, Abu al-Wafa, and the city of Darbgonbad. The results of the investigations showed that due to the lack of attention to place and place-making indicators in development plans, the natural landscape and its place-making role have faced transformation and the cultural role of natural elements in various fields such as housing and communications have been overlooked, and resulted in unplanned interventions irrespective of the natural environment, upset the tripartite combination of the landscape. In this article, an attempt has been made to examine the pathology of the situation caused by the lack of protection of the natural landscape as a place-making component in the development process of the mentioned villages.

**Keywords** | *Development, Place, Protection, Village Landscape, Natural Landscape.*

**Introduction** | How does protecting the natural scenery of villages as a place-making component contribute to the process of rural development?

In the process of human development, as the most important cornerstone of development, we cannot ignore the natural landscape in reading the rural landscape, because rural landscapes reflect people's reading of the nature around them over time, and they are known as natural and cultural landscapes showing the social transformation of nature through the possession of a cultural and ethnic group (Abarghouei Fard & Saboonchi, 2020) and give the village landscape an independent identity. Therefore, the two components of the environment—human culture and nature—play an equal role in the formation of the village landscape and, consequently, in the development process. The city of Kuhdasht is located at the end of Lorestan, near the provinces of Ilam and Kermanshah. The people of this area were nomads who had to live in one place because of the forced settlement of nomads during the Pahlavi era (Heydari Yeganeh, 2014, 5). The perception of these nomads from the natural

landscape has been transferred to the landscape of the villages where there is a scene of the natural occurrence of human habitation and his efforts to stabilize his position in the natural environment (Norberg Schultz cited in Abargoui Fard & Saboonchi, 2017). Based on the requirements of life in the natural environment, natural elements play the role of cultural and symbolic objects in the formation of the rural landscape, and this leads to the residents' deep understanding of the potential of the environment and its orderliness (Abarghouei Fard & Saboonchi, 2018). As a result, the history of migration in this area has underscored the importance of the relationship between these two landscapes. Likewise, the role of nature as a place-making element and the influence of the natural landscape on the village landscape, and ultimately its place-making role cannot be overlooked, and the importance of protecting this landscape cannot be denied. In this article, an attempt has been made to investigate the effect of the natural landscape as a place-making component in the process of rural development and to analyze the damage to the natural landscape of villages caused by the non-place-based development process.

### Critical Analysis

Disregarding the importance of place in the development process means overlooking users' understanding of place, which not only

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includes geographical aspects but also things, such as semiotics and phenomenology. As human power is the main cornerstone of development, lack of attention to people's perception of the place (settlement) as well as the natural landscape transformation through human interventions over time can cause a lot of damage to the perception of the place and, as a result, the landscape of the villages will be affected. The protection of the natural landscape as a part of the place should always be taken into account to avoid unwanted changes that might distort the sense of place and arouse the inverse response to the development process. The protection measures can prevent the gradual devaluation of the historical process of culturalization of nature in each village over time. During the process of implementing development plans in the observed villages, inattentiveness to the specific context of each case has caused the landscape of the village to become an unfamiliar landscape for the residents. Field observations indicate that villages are changing into cities, and the duality of city and village is vanishing. During this process, the natural landscape has faced serious damages, such as disruption of sight and view, loss of access, the occurrence of visual disturbances, and the like. This article is an attempt to describe and analyze the damages caused to the natural landscape of several villages in the Kuhdasht region of Lorestan province through field observations. In doing so the inefficient effect of development plans on the village and, accordingly, the residents' perception of the village has been presented.

#### • Pathology of the studied samples

##### - Sorkhdom Laki village

Sorkhdom Laki village is situated near Sorkhdom Mountain. The distinctive feature of this village is its red soil, which has an attractive and unique appearance. Also, the remnant of the old texture in the village shows this red soil used to be used as the main material for the architecture of the village. Apart from the soil, one of the other important features of this village is its view of the natural landscape of the village (Fig. 1), and the village is endowed with this favorable feature due to its location on a hill. What was seen in the observations and field investigation is the negligence of the potentials and capabilities of the natural landscape, including the existing favorable landscape, due to improperly equipping the village with gas lines and the distortion of the natural landscape of the village during the current development and as a result of the national gas supply development plan. The arrival of a new element, which is of course disproportionate to the context and product of development has distorted what the residents had in mind and perceived of the village over the years. The observations indicates that there is no proper development plan and definitions in this village to emphasize the place components, such



Fig. 1. Sorkhdom natural perspective of the gas pipes.  
Photo: Zeynab Rezaei, 2023.

as the unique soil of the village or its viewpoint, while in some well-known villages in Iran, these natural features which are used as signs for the construction of the village has acted as a place-making element. In a conversation with one of the employees of the Anthropology Museum of Kuhdasht in this village, it was found that the villagers are very interested in allocating development plans such as Hadi plan. For that reason, they are moving more and moving towards urbanization. From the point of view of the residents, development plans are a factor contributing to the progress and improvement of the unsettled conditions of the village. This understanding of the importance of the plans and their acceptance is very significant. On this account, the method of preparing these plans needs to be revised so that we won't face the disappointing outcomes otherwise positive attitudes among the locals will be (Fig. 2).

##### - Payastan (Payasin) village

This village is part of the district of Tarhan in Kuhdasht and is located in the west of the city. Field observations show that the landscape of the village has completely moved away from its identity after the implementation of Hadi plan and the development of the village. Approval of development plans regardless of the context in this village has also destroyed the housing format, and the organic form of the roads, and given priority to the scale of the rider and the accesses, which has caused functional damage and the influence of the foothills as one of the components of the natural landscape of the village is no longer visible (Fig. 3).

##### - Abu al-Wafa village and the city of Darbgonba

Abu al-Wafa Village and the City of Darbgonbad in the past, the triad of the Iranian landscape included water, trees, and mountains (or Chahartagh: an architectural structure composed of four arches), all three of which are considered manifestations of the Iranian natural landscape (Fig. 4). Studies show that this triad, as a natural-cultural combination, has been a place-making factor contributing to the formation and development of Iranian settlements and has been effective in the formation of many villages and cities over time (Abarghouei Fard, 2019). Field observations in Abu al-Wafa village also show the existence of this triad in the past. The existence of the imamzade (i.e. shrine) of the village is also proof of this claim. Because in the past, religious and sacred places were usually built in the vicinity of this triad, it seems that today the development process and development plans such as Hadi plan have led to the conflict of this triad. In the studies, it seems that the components of this triad have moved away from their past location, and this dispersion has caused their coherence and communication to be lost and their perception to be disturbed. For example, the tree that was probably on top of the



Fig. 2. Location of the village on the foothills.  
Source: Author adapted from GOOGLE EARTH

mountain one day has been cut down, and the spring in the village has been also destroyed due to a lack of attention and turned into a garbage collection place. Therefore, it has lost its sanctity, and its importance in the perception of the village residents has changed. The construction of the new street is another example of intervention without considering the natural-cultural context of the village or the location of Imamzadeh, and in this way, the triad of the landscape has been completely neglected. Also, in the development of this village, the main axis of the village has been designed to be a forty-meter street, regardless of the direction of the fountain and Imamzadeh to accommodate the visiting population for holding ceremonies on some occasions, such as Arbaeen Hosseini (religious observance held for the martyrdom of Imam Hussein ibn Ali). Due to the widening of this street, the possibility of its maintenance is reduced, and the feeling of being abandoned and unfamiliar has been created. Therefore, what can be seen in this village is the destruction of the original rural landscape under the influence of development plans (Fig. 5 & 6). As mentioned earlier, from ancient Iran until now, this landscape (i.e., the combination of water, trees, mountains, or four arches) has existed and shaped the natural landscape. The combination of these three elements, which together form the triad of the Iranian landscape, was a new event that did not happen all at once but gradually, and over the centuries (Mansouri, 2019). Field observations in the city

of Darb Gonbad also show the existence of this triad: the Sycamore tree, the imamzadeh (Chartaqi), and probably water. The mountain, which is completely in the center of Imamzadeh's view, seems to be an important element of the natural landscape in this city. Examining the works of development in this city shows that the lack of understanding of the three dimensions and the capacities of the place has caused serious damage to the place and its perception. Among these interventions in which the context has been ignored, we can refer to ignoring the natural landscape of the mountain and building. A park and promenade have affected a gazebo and a toilet in the view axis, and the entrance of Imamzadeh. Development measures that not only did not improve the conditions of the city but also have led to serious damage to the natural landscape and residents' perceptions of the city have been formed based on understanding the construction only and not attention has been paid the capacities of the location (Fig. 7).

### Summary

According to the field observations, analysis, and evaluation of the mentioned examples, it can be stated that the development plans are gradually transforming the natural landscape and its place-making role, and by changing the landscape of the villages, they have affected their authenticity and history. Efforts in the path of development have



Fig. 3. The development of the village around the new street without taking into account the village's mountainous view. Source: Author, adapted from GOOGLE EARTH.



Fig. 4. The position of outlet before and after the development of the debouchure of the aqueduct and spring in Payastan village. Photo: Zeynab Rezaei, 2023.



Fig. 5. The mismatch of the aqueduct and Imamzade on one axis. Photo: Zeynab Rezaei, 2023.



Fig. 6. The mismatch between the axis and Imamzade and the axis and Spring. Source: Author using GOOGLE EARTH.



Fig. 7. Lack of attention to the view of the foothills and the construction of two floors on one side of the entrance of Imamzadeh and the toilet on the other side. Photo: Zeynab Rezaei, 2023.

not had any fruits other than development as renovation, which means passing from tradition to modernity, from the village to the city (Leftwich, 2006). For example, lack of attention to the potential such as the natural environment of the village, including the views and foothills, the negligence of the components of placemaking, such as the triad of the Iranian landscape, or inappropriate constructions by making physical changes without considering the mentality of the residents lead to the production of unfamiliar, intangible, and possibly ineffective spaces for the residents. Due to this contrast and the desire of the residents to become urban, it seems, we are witnessing a transformation for the city with wide and lonely streets, which has turned its back on its identifying elements by neglecting the natural landscape and ultimately the role of a place maker. It has lost itself in the development process. In this urbanized village, the sense of belonging has been lost, and gradually, the residents are not making any effort to protect their landscape. In this way, the protection of the natural landscape is the protection of a living and dynamic history to narrate.

### Conclusion

The process of development is always considered positive; if this development is not place-oriented, it turns into its opposite and causes structural, functional, identity, and value damages to the natural landscape, its role in spatial development, and ultimately to the village landscape. From the continuation of the lives of the villages. The scenery is the perception of the place by the audience. Therefore, the audience's perception of the place, which is the subject of discussion in the perspective approach, should be considered in the development process. Preservation of the natural

landscape according to the role of its place-making is paying attention to the audience's perception of natural elements and then the perception of the place. Field observations in the mentioned villages showed that in many cases, the development is not based on the capacities of the places, and it is the only product of the upstream development plans by the urban management, regardless of the context. Such negligence causes damage to the place distorting the residents' perception of the space. Also, residents' lack of awareness of their role in protecting the landscape of the village and their indifference towards the landscape are other factors that can harm this landscape. Among the other damages that have been counted is the duality of the city and the village can not be recognized, which is the result of a lack of attention to the place in rural development plans. These plans need to draw upon a comprehensive approach to fit the capacity of the place. Failure of attention to the importance of protection shows that the measures taken only comply with physical standards and cause damages including abandonment, destruction of the structure and landscape of the village, loss of identity and authenticity, destruction of both collective spaces and the core of the village, migration of villagers, and in the landscape of the village and residents' perceptions of the village have finally disappeared. Therefore, it seems that the development plans should be place-based to protect the values and capacities of the place, such as the natural landscape, and audience-oriented. Such a plan should highlight the role of man in the environment and promote spontaneous interaction with nature. In doing so, the place will be preserved and the residents' perception will be considered and residents can contribute to protecting and developing the rural landscape from the natural landscape.

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