

Investigating the Socio-Cultural Impacts in Redevelopment of the Urban Coastal Areas in Mazandaran Province, Iran

Mohsen Feyzi

Associate professor, Department of architecture, University of Science and Technology
Tehran, Iran

Hashem Hashem Nejad

Associate professor, Department of architecture, University of Science and Technology
Tehran, Iran

Morteza Seddigh

Ph.D. candidate, Department of architecture, University of Science and Technology
Tehran, Iran

E-mail: seddigh.atelieh@gmail.com

Abstract

The socio-cultural dimensions of urban coastal areas redevelopment plans have become very important in urban policies. The aim of this paper is to recognize the socio-cultural effects of urban coastal areas redevelopment. For this objective, four dimensions of socio-cultural impacts in urban coastal areas planning are presented: identity and resources, social status, activities and access and coastal areas experience. The four socio-cultural dimensions refer to the various ways of experiencing and using the edges of the sea, river or lake to make an understanding of their qualities to the community. The contents of this typology are presented by analyzing some fundamental features of the coastal areas in southern shorelines of the Caspian Sea.

Keywords: Socio-cultural impacts, Redevelopment, Urban, Coastal areas, Iran

1. Introduction

The competition for waterfront space in coastal urban areas, in addition to the need for public access to the shore and the conservation of coastal areas biodiversity have become an important issue in urban policies. The issue is contradictory, complex and full of pressures based upon various views and factors. The multiplicity of needs and different physical context make design both an opportunity and a challenge.

By 'urban coastal areas' we mean here the water's edge in towns and cities of all capacities. The water may be a lake, river, bay, ocean, canal or creek. In a coastal area 'plan' or 'project' we include all the things from a wildlife sanctuary to a container port, and the full range of uses in between. The 'project' might be a haphazard development occurring over time, or it might be planned as a unified undertaking, with multiple participants and owners. For our objectives a coastal areas project might include buildings and regions that are not directly on the water but are tied to it historically, ecologically or visually or are linked to it as part of a larger scheme.

The urban coastal areas have experienced large transitions, during the last decades. As more people have found more strategies to take delight in the coastal areas, it has excessively been taken away from public uses. Use of the urban coastal regions has been usurped by gigantic ports and extraneous utilizations, such as factories, warehouses and transportation. However, during the recent decades, the attraction of the urban shorelines has been proved and efforts have been made to conserve what is left of it. Since the last four decades, many coastal areas have experienced a reorientation from 'green belts' or 'brown fields' to residential, commercial and recreational areas. Planning tools developed and new laws have been passed in order to decide what can be built near the water. It can be stated that existing urban coastal areas redevelopment projects represent today an international undertaking in urban policies and planning. Urban coastal areas redevelopment as we know it today incarnates the historic alteration of water and land uses along the edges of hundreds of cities, small and large, among the world. Multifaceted and complex, current coastal areas redevelopment trend is attributable to a

number of factors, notably: (1) Technological changes since post World War II, which led to deterioration and/or abandonment of hundreds of acres of industrial land across coastal areas, (2) movement of the historic preservation, (3) Heightened water cleanup and environmental awareness, (4) Redeveloping central city areas, (5) Public (state, municipal and federal) urban renewal and related assistance.

These and other forces combined have brought about major changes in the last thirty years that have altered the face of urban coastal regions for today and future generations. The recent shift from industrial functions of the urban coastal areas is as profound as the initial 18th and 19th century development of shores and harbors for industry, and their use in earlier times for storage, shipping and shipbuilding.

During last decades different policy concepts have been utilized in order to monitor the structural changes in urban land-use, also urban coastal areas. In the year 2000, Roberts has clarified five different periods in the evolution of urban redevelopment: 1) reconstruction (1950s), 2) revitalization (1960s), 3) renewal (1970s), 4) redevelopment (1980s), 5) redevelopment (1990s). The move has been from physically oriented sectoral renewal schemes towards a more understanding form of practice and policy with more concentration on integrated treatments. The ideas of redevelopment have meant an introduction of broader idea of environmental sustainability containing also the community targets and social aspects. (Ansari Nia, 2008) The different redevelopment periods have also affected the urban coastal area policies. Today, redevelopment of the urban coastal areas happens in a societal environment of increased capital mobility and inter-urban competition. Because cities have to compete for affluent residents and investments, city governments cannot merely 'control' the development, i.e. concentration on the redistribution of resources, but should actively pursue publicity and investments to survive in the increasing inter-urban competition. Therefore, the new economic configurations are accompanied by more fragmented, flexible and entrepreneurial forms of governance. Urban governance has expanded to involve not only the government but also a range of semi-public and private actors. This approach to urban governance, based on private-public partnership, aggressive marketing, flagship projects and consumption-oriented projects such as tourism and retail centers has been labeled entrepreneurial urban governance, and it is usually well exemplified by large-scale urban coastal regions redevelopment projects. While speaking about urban coastal areas redevelopment, the strategies of urban densification could not be forgotten. One of the leading policies of growing regions is to increase the density of the urban structure in order to improve sustainable development by minimizing investments in energy consumption, infrastructure and emissions from private car traffic. (Breen, 1996) These urban densification processes have intensified the building and planning of coastal areas close to the city centers. Therefore, the compaction policies have provided environmental challenges to 'redevelo' these sensitive regions, which were traditionally contradictory and difficult questions for policy makers.

Urban coastal areas redevelopment projects are not just some examples of new governance policy targets and styles, but also objects of intensive local planning conflicts and debates. Various interest groups and the citizens have been widely interested in how the urban coastal areas are planned. What are the real targets and reasons? Whom are the plans made for? What types of social or environmental effects do the plans have?

The coastal regions are often strategic areas in urban development, because their usage has indirect or direct effects on the image of the place (city beside the lake, coastal city, riverside town) and on social equity (coastal areas as locations of high-price housing and gentrification), and at the same time they often represent unbuilt natural resources or green regions in the urban structure. These complexes and frequently adverse planning situations have created new needs for the coastal area planning methods and processes. Today, the renewal of urban coastal regions needs to be planned more cautiously than before. In this context, considering the socio-cultural impacts and aspects of coastal areas redevelopment has become increasingly important task for both the actual substance development and the legitimacy of coastal areas plans and projects. (Burdge, 1998)

This task is much related to the common developments of impact assessment practices in urban planning. The impact assessment processes and participatory planning strategies are one of the important methods, which have been developed to satisfy the general legitimacy qualifications of 'cautious' land use planning. But there are some important problems in regarding this issue. The whole question of when and how we assess the impacts of general and/or town plans is a rather new matter in urban planning systems all over the world. Environmental impact assessment has been considered widely in urban infrastructure projects (project level) and sometimes in strategic level (such as plans of the city development), but the impact assessment of concrete land-use plans has been very poorly developed region. The socio-cultural impact assessment of land-use plans has been much more weakly developed region. To conclude, there is a clear demand for developing the contents of social impact assessment of urban coastal areas redevelopment and planning.

2. Definition of Social Impact Assessment

Social impact assessment does not have any universally accepted, single definition. However, its content and subject matter include distinguishable components that consistently appear when the SIA process is performed. concerning the International Association for Impact Assessment, “social impact assessment includes the processes of analyzing, managing and monitoring the unintended and intended social consequences, both negative and positive, of planned interventions (policies, programs, plans and projects) and any socio-cultural change processes invoked by those interventions” (IAIA 2003). Based upon the writings of several SIA practitioners and researchers we can identify following features characteristic to the SIA process.

- SIA is a tool for developing alternatives and determining the full range of effects for each alternative.
- It is related to environmental impact assessment (EIA).
- It is done in advance during the planning stage in order to offer better knowledge-base for the decision-making procedures.
- It is a tool for developing adaptation, mitigation or compensation measures for the harmful socio-cultural impacts. Socio-cultural impacts have usually contextual features and they represent complex social dynamics or relations. The nature of social change will vary with the size and type of a development plan or project, as well as with the nature of the community in which the project is located. To survey social change social scientists should switch from their traditional concentration on structure in social organizations to a more dynamic assessment of the socio-cultural impacts of planned change.

Therefore, in the SIA research we have to apply different kinds of theoretical concepts or models and investigate the case-specific situations. When seeking after not formal relations, it is good to notice that causal models incorporate also the idea of multiple-causality, that is, there can be more than one cause for any specific effect. On the other hand, socio-cultural impacts refer not only to causal relationships but also to social subjective or communal values and meanings. In addition, one of the main elements of SIA is that it provides strategies for analyzing socio-cultural effects from the views of different population groups (age, social, ethnic, etc.). Therefore, SIA should operate within the context of the various perspectives and value sets of the different actors. (Craig-Smith, 1995) The methodology of socio-cultural impact assessment favors a quite pluralistic approach, which can use both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Through this type of pragmatic approach we can find appropriate ways in linking social theory to empirical research.

Public participation or public involvement and social impact assessment should be clearly interactive in process of planning. The community participation issue raises many queries about the validity and extent of the knowledge and opinion of local communities, and about the right of local communities to determine their own fates independent of outside interference. Firstly, the process of public involvement can serve as a means of collecting important data on particular SIA variables. (Feldman, 1999) Surveys, interviews, workshops, etc., are all frequently utilized as public involvement tools and can easily be used to investigate the effects on local socio-cultural structures. Secondly, the general community does not exactly know what the likely consequences of development will be. Thirdly, intense public support of a project does not mean that there will not be any major socio-cultural impacts. SIA will be most successful when fully integrated into planning at the suitable level of jurisdiction. When this integration is accomplished, both environmental and socio-cultural factors become central to planning decisions, rather than being treated as peripheral or external to the planning process. Achieving such integration needs a sound understanding of the nature of planning on the one hand, and how improvements in knowledge about impact assessment and its various methodologies can fit into modern planning models on the other.

3. The social aspect of urban coastal areas redevelopment

The social impact assessment of urban coastal regions planning examines the various ways of experiencing and utilizing the edges of lakes, seas or rivers and understanding their qualities for the community. Here, the goal of SIA is to promote the awareness of decision-makers, planners and the whole community about the social and cultural aspects of coastal areas, such as the recreational, physical, and cultural relationships between a community and the coastal areas. In general, the main planning query concerns the relations between natural environments and human-modified. In addition, one of the major tasks of SIA is to guess how the nature of a community might change as a result of a particular project and to recognize the stakeholders, the losers and the winners of the proposed activities. The socio-cultural dimension of urban coastal areas redevelopment can be divided into four categories: socio-cultural status, resources and identity, access and activities, and coastal areas experience. (Roberts, 2000) The categories are based upon an analysis of earlier SIA-investigations and urban

coastal areas studies. These categories can be utilized for analyzing and identifying the social impacts of urban coastal areas projects and plans (Table 1).

When analyzing the socio-cultural aspects of coastal areas redevelopment the degree of water “dependency” is significant. A threefold classification of water dependency is recognizable:

1. Water-related utilizations (increasing the advantages of coastal regions' location)
2. Water-independent uses (neither dependent nor related to coastal areas).
3. Water-dependent uses (coastal regions' location is indispensable)

In socio-cultural impact assessment different impact categories should be analyzed according to these various uses. The degree of water dependency and the possible consequences are dependent on the perspectives and interests of the people involved. First of all, people who utilize waterfront areas for place of work, residence, or recreation are associated with waterfront regions for industry, housing, transport, commerce, and a variety of recreational and leisure facilities. Secondly, those people who view waterfront regions as a public resource are concerned about the use and quality of waterfront areas even if they themselves might not directly benefit or use the resource. (Larsen, 1992) It is the second group of people who are inclined to utilize a water-related corridor as an environmental and recreational resource.

4. Coastal areas redevelopment in Mazandaran

In this part, the case-study regions, three new coastal areas in Mazandaran province in Iran, are introduced (Figure 1). Afterwards, the four aspects of socio-cultural impacts of urban coastal areas planning (Table 1) are presented by using these cases.

Case-study areas are utilized in order to construct, identify and at the same time illustrate various features of socio-cultural aspects in urban coastal areas planning. The paper is based upon post-evaluation using expert interviews (land-use planners from Mazandaran) and literature reviews as methods. The case studies are not methodologically or empirically comprehensive case analysis, but a kind of test cases for applying the impact typology and for developing further the substantial understanding of urban coastal areas redevelopment. The general institutional system and at the same time the planning cultures of Finnish urban shoreline areas planning have been under major changes during last decades. There was made an amendment to the historic Building Act already in 1996 about the needs of impact assessment in land use planning. The problem was that the planning issues did not take these needs seriously. We had to wait for renewal of the whole planning legislation to make the impact assessment more effective in urban planning.

Building Act and the Land Use, which came into force in the year 2000, brought many reforms. It introduced new roles of various administrative levels of planning, changed the verification procedures and quality criteria and added communication requirements and openness. According to Building Act and the Land Use there should be enough investigation of a plan's potential environmental impacts, consisting of implications for the community economy, cultural, social and other effects. Therefore, socio-cultural impacts are mentioned separately in legislation.

Based upon the Land Use and Building Decree (1999) environmental impacts are understood as indirect and direct affect:

- Landscape, townscape, cultural heritage and the built environment;
- Human living conditions and environment;
- Animals and plants, water, climate and air;
- Community and regional structure, community and energy economy and traffic;
- Flora and fauna, natural resources and biodiversity.

There have been several urban coastal region redevelopment projects in Mazandaran in the last twenty years. Occasional projects were carried out already in early 1980s, but the possibility for large-scale coastal area revitalization was brought up in 1987, which identified possible regions for revitalization. Some of the regions housed ports or port-related industry; some were home or wasteland to small-scale industry. However, these regions were predominantly on municipal land, which ensured that the construction works of the first region could be started already in 1987. Coastal regions will be a central focus for planning in Mazandaran for years to come, since the construction of a new freight harbor outside the dense urban structure will free the last central regions for redevelopment by 2009.

Noshahr was one of the first coastal regions to be built after the new planning focus of the 1980s. The area has a central location, only two kilometers north from the city centre. Noshahr is the first of the three artificial capes that have to be revitalized in the Harbor-district. The other two currently house a passenger harbor and a port.

The residential area in Noshahr is situated directly on the coastal region; the adjacent office area is situated close to important traffic arteries. The residential buildings' construction process began in 1981, whereas due to the economic recession the construction of the office buildings was not started until 1990. The objective was to make a dense housing region for altogether 10000–15,000 people and new jobs for 6000 people. The socio-cultural structure of the new residential region was carefully planned, although no concise social impact assessment was made. Residents' perceptions could not be taken into consideration during the planning process, since Noshahr was an uninhabited brown field area without any existing housing. As post-evaluation the residents of the new Noshahr were interviewed on two different occasions in order to understand their experiences of the new area.

Tonekabon is situated in western Mazandaran approximately 35 km from the centre in a district called ShahSavar. The population of the region has risen rapidly in the last decade due to the construction of new housing areas. The older parts have no straight connection to waterside, whereas the newer parts, including Tonekabon, are situated on the coastal areas. The major construction works of Tonekabon started in 1990. The objective has been to build a high-quality, dense housing-area for people, where the location of the coastal region, as well as the surrounding natural environments is taken into account as well as possible. All housing will be owner-occupied and non-subsidized. A specific aspect in the planning of Tonekabon is public– private partnership. Despite no comprehensive SIA was created in Tonekabon, socio-cultural aspects affected the decision to build only private housing. The predominantly city-subsidized housing structure in some older parts of ShahSavar had lead to an unbalanced social structure in the area. By building high-quality private housing in Tonekabon, a more balanced socio-cultural structure and a better image for the district were hoped to be achieved.

Babolsar is located 15 km northeast from the city centre. The construction works started in 1988, and by the year 2011 the population should reach 10,000. A fascinating feature in Babolsar is the focus of art and design schools and cultural industries. This “Art and Design City” is developed adjacent to a porcelain factory, which has been operating in the area since 1905. The aim has been to build an area, where the latest technologies (wireless communication network) and new innovations in housing enable new forms of working and living. Babolsar is the only one of the three case-study regions, where a separate Social Impact Assessment was made. The report on socio-cultural impacts in 1998 is just part of a series of impact assessment reports made by the Mazandaran planning department for Babolsar. Reasons for such an extended impact assessment could be the nearby natural conservation region and bird sanctuary, the important industrial and cultural heritage as well as the existing housing in the adjacent regions. (Young, 1998) The SIA report analyses the socio-cultural status and social-demography as well as the identity of the region before and after the new development. The report expresses that despite the area has historically had a fairly low socio-cultural status as a working class district, the status has improved slowly since the 1990s. Gentrification has been particularly strong in the idyllic wooden house regions. This development is expected to continue with the construction of the new region. The main socio-cultural goals in building Babolsar were to maintain and create a versatile socio-cultural and housing structure, to make a positive image for the whole region, to cater for weak population groups and to provide sufficient services.

4.1 Identity and Resources

In the first class of the social dimension of urban coastal areas planning the following questions can be asked:

What are the main aspects of the coastal areas?

Which sources can be considered as strengths in the region?

What are the environmental, historical or cultural values of a specific region and what do visitors /citizens think about these values?

Do the coastal areas have importance to the social, visual and cultural identity of the community?

Does the local community/city make use of coastal areas as part of local identity?

Do some resources contribute to the image of a region?

The sea has always been a major part in Mazandaran. It is a traffic artery, as well as an important element of the city's image and identity. In recent years the city has been trying to open up its shores, and today nearly the

entire long shoreline is accessible to the community. Coastal areas redevelopment projects can help form the image of the whole city, when old abandoned regions on the waterfront areas are cleaned up and the appearance of the sea is being utilized better.

The maritime nature of *Noshahr* was created by the canal that runs through the residential region and opens up to the sea, as well as by the nearby freight port. The sea is also existent in the street names of Noshahr. The next characteristic is the site in northern Mazandaran just 10 km from the city centre adjacent to highly valued, old residential quarters. It is not common these days, that a completely new residential area so adjacent to the centre on the coastal parts can be built, which has made the planning of Noshahr a real challenge. The goal has been to make Noshahr a part of northern Mazandaran by extending the compact urban structure of the centre northeast. Another goal has been to give all visitors and residents alike the possibility to use the coastal areas by making high quality public space on the shores of the canal. Cultural values are depicted by the Cable Factory, which presently houses e.g., galleries artists' work rooms, a restaurant and museums. *Tonekabon* is characterized by the versatile natural regions nearby: the sea, the forests and the archipelago. The location by the sea has been considered well by leaving the coastal areas open to people and by giving as many people as possible a view to the sea. A particular characteristic is the public shore in front of the residential buildings, which makes Tonekabon unique in Mazandaran. Despite the buildings are mostly owner-occupied and private, the beach is likely to attract residents from other parts of city at least in the summertime. The image of Tonekabon as an expensive and well-planned residential region on the coastal areas will, no doubt, influence the image of the whole city positively.

Babolsar is chiefly characterized by two elements, water and art. However, Babolsar differs from the other two regions since, being placed on the mouth of a river; it is not fundamentally maritime in character. However, many buildings have a view of the bay and people use the bicycle and pedestrian ways on the coastal areas and small islands and the nearby green regions.

Since Babolsar is home to the porcelain factory, which has also given its name to the area, the culture-image and art has a strong historic origin. In the redevelopment of the area the cultural image is further emphasized by establishing "The Art and Design City", a concentration of art-related companies and art schools. The art industry and the residential area are limit together by allowing artist create works of art in the squares and streets, in some cases even inside residential buildings. (Figure 2)

4.2 Social status

In the second class of the social dimension of urban coastal areas planning the following questions can be asked:

- For whom (for example different social, ethnic or age groups) are the coastal areas built and planned?
- What is the role of private/ social housing in forming the social status of a region?
- How can social discrimination be prevented?
- Is it possible that the coastal areas plan make gentrification?

Every urban coastal areas redevelopment project is unique. As do the users the area is built for, the aims for constructing a recent area vary. Everybody can, however, distinguish six major themes that coastal areas redevelopment projects can be classified into according to their main function:

- Historical areas
- Commercial areas
- Recreational areas
- Working areas
- Residential areas
- Environmental, educational and Cultural areas

Because of the growing population in the Mazandaran area and the pressure for more office space and housing specifically close to the city centre, the emphasis in coastal areas redevelopment projects has been on office and residential development. Both the attractiveness of living on the coastal areas and the rise population has tended to raise the apartment prizes. The main tool for decreasing the tension between public and private interests has been the balance between private and social housing.

The three case-study areas of the paper show the residential coastal areas, although characteristics of working and the recreational coastal areas are also present. The goal here is to discover what type of a role private and social housing have in forming the social status and how social segregation is prevented.

In *Noshahr*, the purpose has been to create a residential area with a varied social structure. This has been obtained by constructing a variety of city-subsidized housing for people with different demands, ranging from social rental apartments to the so-called private-apartments, which are owner-occupied but whose value is controlled by the city. Only 5% of the apartments in Noshahr are owner-occupied and privately built. The so-called mixed houses, where different kinds of housing (rental, owner-occupied, subsidized, etc.) exist in the same building, were developed as a way for obtaining a socially balanced population structure. Noshahr can be seen as having a well-balanced social structure and these mixed houses have been usually well reviewed by all the parties. (SPI, 2004)

The residential area of *Tonekabon* includes only private housing. The lack of social housing is the aim to balance the predominantly rental and social housing structure of the region of the city, as well as to raise the public image of the whole region. Gentrification may influence residential buildings nearby, but buildings with social housing are not affected because of the form of housing. Boosting up the image of the city is a good idea, but some questions remain: Do residents of older parts of Shahsavari consider Tonekabon as a separate area or as an elemental part of Shahsavari? Do the new residents consider themselves only as residents of Tonekabon, or also as residents of Shahsavari? Does the positive image of Tonekabon really influence the rest of the huge residential area?

The social structure of *Babolsar* was completely considered in the SIA in 1994. (Burdge, 1998) The report states that in order to create and maintain a versatile social structure, the emphasis would have to lie on city-subsidized housing (rental, owner-occupied private, etc). The importance of private housing could have led to high property prices because of the closeness of both the sea and the city centre. With the construction of different types of housing, people with different ways have the possibility to live in the region. Inside the region, it is important that all residential buildings, private or city-subsidized, will be of the same high quality. People's interest in Babolsar appears to be high, and gentrification is likely to seem in older residential areas nearby.

4.3 Activities and accesses

In the third class of the social dimension of urban coastal areas planning the following questions can be asked:

- Do natural–block or barriers–artificial the way to the water?
- Are the coastal areas accessible to the public?
- Does the urban structure provide easy accesses to the shore for vehicles and pedestrians?
- Do parking pose and traffic problems near the coastal areas?
- How has the presence of water been considered in the urban structure of the area?
- Are suitable access facilities provided (ramps to the trails, beach, picnic facilities, fishing, viewing, boating, etc.)?
- Are the paths to the shore clearly marked?
- Have facilities been provided to allow visitors /citizens /tourists to make use of the recreational potential?

Dockyards and ports have long occupied the urban coastal areas, which has made these regions strictly guarded and unreachable to the public. Not surprisingly, an important character in coastal areas redevelopment is to make the coastal areas reachable to people. Breen and Rigby (1996) emphasize this character specifically since recreation on the coastal areas has become so popular in recent years. They find with regret that in many cases where a coastal area is used for residential goals, the area is sealed off from the public with psychological or physical barriers. They emphasize that such limits should be avoided and attractive and visible walkways should be constructed by the water.

In Mazandaran, the city has been actively trying for opening its coastal areas to the public. At the present time, most of the coastal area is open and lined by recreational trails. One of the most popular trails runs around southern Mazandaran, although in some places this trail remains severed by industry and port. One can follow this trail to the *Noshahr* canal, where both beaches have been left open to pedestrians. There are no psychological or physical barriers on the coastal areas so both visitors and residents can enjoy the region. Since the paving extends to the water and the canal is artificial, there is no real possibility to get in the water. Therefore, one has to go swimming elsewhere.

The *Tonekabon* coastal area gives the expression of being both natural and urban. The beach and the marina are separated from the residential buildings by paved walkways, making the coastal areas easily accessible to both residents and visitors. It is very likely that the beach will attract residents from other parts of Shahsavari, although other beaches nearby will give the residents many possibilities to decide. For residents outside of Shahsavari, the coastal area is far away, although Tonekabon is easily reached by the bus or underground.

The coastal park in *Babolsar* is connected to other recreational areas via a trail that runs through the park. The park is thus a part of the open coastal areas. The park is easily accessible to everyone, since the residential buildings are not directly placed on the coastal areas. On the opposite side of the bay, there is a bird sanctuary, which was one reason for leaving the seashore unbuilt.

Despite the current situation seems good in Babolsar, the planning process was overshadowed by a conflict of interests between the residents of city and the nearby areas. The residents' main desire was that the coastal park should be greater and the residential area less dense than planned. However, the department of planning trusted that the quality of the whole area will get better with the improvement and intensified care of the green areas as well as with the diversification of the service sector. The residents' ideas were thus heard in the planning process, but they did not have any major effect on the final decisions.

4.4 Coastal areas experience

In the fourth class of the social dimension of urban coastal areas planning the following questions can be asked:

- How important are visual signs (open or closed scenes), smells (sea breeze, cooking from cafes), physical touch (textures of sand, water and rock), voices (birds, sea wind, traffic) and moving in the space (how easy it is to move)?
- Does the path to the beach make a sense of transition, identifying this as the way to the coastal area?
- How do visitors to the region perceive the existing resources?
- How do people experience the coastal area's environment?

According to the Karvinen (1997) urban coastal areas act as a territory between the uncontrolled nature and the controlled urban structure. On the urban coastal areas the city residents have the possibility to encounter the wild nature by just walking along the beach on paths or swimming in the water or streets. Ansari Nia (2008) states that in the construction projects of new years the coastal areas has been ritualized by the view to the sea and emphasizing the attendance of nature. This has changed the nature of the coastal areas by making them an object of visual aesthetics.

In the case study areas the attendance of water can be perceived variously. In all three areas the buildings are fairly high and the urban structure is relatively dense. However, one coastal area is remarkably urban; two represent various mixtures between natural and urban or recreational coastal areas.

The sea plays a important role in *Noshahr*, where water is incorporated into the residential region in the shape of a canal which opens up to the sea. Buoys for sailing boats and motor boats line both sides of the canal and in the summer season a small ferry takes people to a nearby island. Since Noshahr is urban in its nature, water as a natural element is kept under control by extending the pavement into the water on both sides of the canal. However, the sounds, the wind and the smells make the attendance of water absolutely felt in the streets and on the squares of Noshahr. This is not always favorable, since particularly in the autumn the cold wind pushes into all parts of the region through the straight, wide streets. (Figure 3)

The *Tonekabon* coastal area is lined by a promenade and a public beach, which brings a south-European flair to the region. One major feature is the coastal marina, which is located in front of the residential buildings next to the shore. Furthermore, an artificial canal will be constructed in the western part of the area. It is clear that the coastal areas has been a central point in the planning of the area and the sea can be absolutely felt at least in those residential areas closest to water. The fairly compact built residential region is offset by the nearby recreational areas and natural environments on the coastal areas.

The coastal areas experience of *Babolsar* differs from the other two areas, because the built-up area is distinguished from the water by a narrow and long park. It has clearly not been a programming priority to make the sea easily felt on the streets of Babolsar. One insuperable fact is that the bay has a little depth and placed on the mouth of a river and the open sea does seem to be at a great distance from this sheltered landscape. However, many buildings have a view to the bay and the waterside park offers everyone the possibility to get close to water. In Babolsar, the nature offers quiet environments for leisure and this seems to be at least as important to the region as the sea.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to identify and construct the social characteristics of urban coastal areas redevelopment and at the same time clarify their use in concrete cases. In urban coastal areas planning and also in land-use planning there is a real lack of understanding the possible role and content of social impact assessment. This paper provides deeper understanding of social characteristics of urban coastal areas redevelopment and also a suitable typology for social impact assessment.

The case studies were not methodologically or empirically comprehensive case analysis, but a type of test cases for applying the impact typology and for developing further the substantial understanding of urban redevelopment of coastal areas.

The social dimensions of urban coastal areas planning and redevelopment refer to the various ways of experiencing and using the seaside to make an understanding of their qualities for the community. An examination of recent literature shows a variety of ways to the classification and interpretation of coastal areas uses. One way of observing the impacts is to analyze the water-dependency of various interests and local actors. We can recognize water-dependent uses, water-independent uses or water-related uses.

In this paper, four various dimensions of social aspects of urban coastal areas planning have been represented: identity and resources, social status, activities and access and coastal areas experience. The contents of the typology have been illustrated by analyzing some basic features of three various coastal areas cases in Mazandaran: Noshahr, Tonekabon and Babolsar. The cases illustrated some variation of impact categories in different types of planning contexts. Generally speaking, the post-evaluation gives positive results. It seems that the redevelopment planning in Mazandaran has taken the social aspects such as social segregation quite well into account already in the planning stage. There does not exist any serious negative impact. Concerning the activities and access and experience of coastal areas, the cases provide clear context-dependent variation in impacts.

The typology of impact categories of our paper can be used generally to impact analysis of urban coastal areas development projects and land-use plans. What would also require to be analyzed in a suitable SIA-process and which has not been done here is the differentiation of impacts concerning to different social, ethnical and age groups.

Social impact assessment makes possibilities to improve land-use planning practices and strategic management of urban coastal areas, as well as the management of urban natural sources in general. The results of impact studies can be fed back into project design to mitigate negative impacts and enhance positive ones. Generally, social dimensions provide information about the social influences but also understanding of the social importance, values and meanings of coastal areas, as well as of the suitable ways of preserving, conserving and changing these environments for mixed use. This way, social impact assessment can also be seen as a method for enhancing the social sustainability of redevelopment projects and land-use plans.

The Conclusions of the SIA practices could increase also the awareness of decision-makers, planners and the whole community about the economic-political and social impacts and characteristics of redevelopment of coastal areas. In general, the main policy question concerns the relationship between natural environments and human-modified. It is important that the economic, social and also ecological impact assessment is integrated in the process of planning.

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Table 1. The socio-cultural aspects of urban coastal areas planning

Identity and Resources	– Opinions of the cultural, environmental or historic values
	– Significance to the social, visual, and cultural identity (community identity ,city image)
	– Main strengths and characteristics of the region
Social Status	– Segregation and/or gentrification procedures
	– For whom (social, ethnic or age groups) are the housing and service areas planned and constructed?
	– Role of private /social housing
Access and Activities	– What types of activities are possible? “Water dependency”
	– Are the coastal regions accessible to the public?
	– Traffic and parking questions; coastal areas routes
	– Easy or difficult approach to coastal areas?
Coastal Regions Experience	– Restorative experiences, importance of visual messages, physical touch, voices, tastes, moving in the space, sense of transition as identification
	– Presence of water (lake, sea, river, etc.)



Figure 1. The locations of Noshahr, Tonekabon and Babolsar in Mazandaran province



Figure 2. Babolsar's fisherman port, Mazandaran Province



Figure 3. A panorama view of Noshahr coastal areas