

# Clarifying Components of Urban Identity in Kish\*

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**ABSTRACT:** The transition from the industrial age and the growing impact of the global economy on human life which has led to rapid expansion of western urban design culture in countries like Iran, are among the reasons why nowadays there is only a memory left in our minds of our traditional cities. "Urban identity" is one of the most important and most controversial issues among urban designers and other professionals involved in urban issues. This is a crisis faced by today's cities for years and has had direct and indirect effects on citizens' everyday lives. Kish Island as one of the most unique island with coral reefs in the world is no exception. In this study, the components of urban identity in Kish are investigated from physical and content dimensions. Based on evaluations, the qualified variables with specific and highlighted traits which play an important role in Kish Island identity are introduced.

**Keywords:** *Identity, Urban identity, Spirit of the place, Island, Spirit of the time*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most crucial and basic challenges that every human being has to face is the issue of identity and self-concept. This self-knowledge in turn leads to an understanding of his needs. Mass living and being in congregations is recognized as one of human needs as a result of which complex living complexes and towns has i with unique identities in both physical and content terms and has survived with mankind to the industrial era. With the advent of the industrial era and its precise criteria the issue of urban functionalism was raised. Consequently, uniform cities emerged which attracted villagers with their factories and other modern manifestations. After years, the ugly side of cities which were incompatible with the human spirit appeared and designers and others concerned with the status quo began discussions about the importance of maintaining the past values. The debate has continued to be active in modern days. Identity of a city plays an important role in its formation as a place. However, in modern times, due to the changes in some basic concepts, understanding the components of a city's identity has become a basic question. The answer to this question can be a solution to many problems (Fig.1). In "Criteria to identify and evaluate the physical identity of cities", three criteria are introduced for identifying these

components:

- 1 - Differences and similarities: the distinction with outsiders and similarities with insiders.
- 2 - Endurance and Change: A sense of connection with the past (continuity of values and concepts of self) alongside proper innovation and creativity (changing the conditions but not the self).
- 3 - Unity and plurality which implies a link between divergent and even contradictory elements, so that together they can create a whole. (Mirmoghtadaee, 2004).

Kish Island is known as one of the most important Iranian centers of business and recreation. Its specific geographic situation and its name which has become a brand of urban tourism among Iranians, have increased attentions to the island and subsequently added to the constructions there to meet the needs of tourists and investors. The constructions have been made mostly based on the needs of the time but whether the identity of the Island has been addressed in this process by policy makers and developers is open to question. We need to assess identity making variables in order to determine a solid ground for creating a place with identity using the spirit of time and place together.

## Research objectives

Thinking about the character and identity of the identity components in Kish Island we can maximize our use of the

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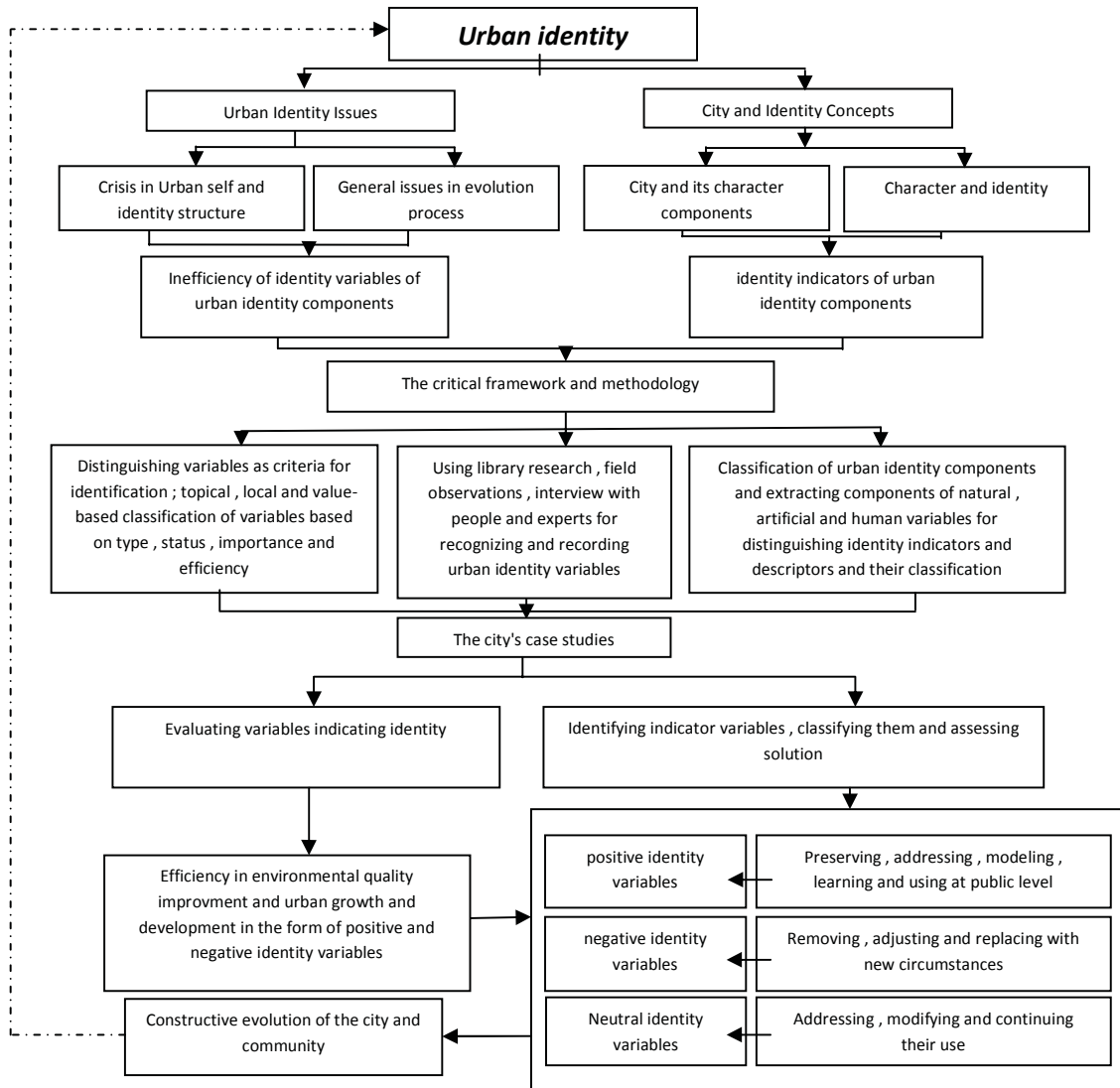


Fig. 1: Operational structure of research on urban identity.( Source: Behzad-far, 2008)

potentials of the place in accordance with the environment to achieve socio-economic prosperity.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research method used in this study is interpretation and analysis. First, by collecting and analyzing related data collected from literature review and library research, the theoretical issues are clarified. Then, research findings and conclusions are presented based on data collected through field study in Kish Island.

## Statement of the problem

Identity is a term whose depth of meaning cannot be clarified using letters and words. But the literal meanings are a clue to discover the real and concrete meaning of words. Doctor Mohammad Amid in his book –Amid Persian Dictionary - defines identity as "the reality of an object or person, including his essential attributes; character, essence, existence, attributed to Hu. e.g.: Identity Sheet (ID card)" (AMID, 1981). Elsewhere, Muhammad Komeili in the article - Urban identity of Bandar Abbas - quoted Imam Davood Qeisari Roomi in

his introduction to Fusûs Al-Hakam Ibn Arabi who defines identity as "the objectivity of an object is called truth in terms of realization, identity in terms of characterization and nature in other aspects" (Komeili, 2008).

### Identity in Latin

The Oxford Dictionary defines identity as "Who or what sb / sth is" which means who or what an individual or element is. (Hornby, 1997). Behzad-far quotes Rahim-zadeh in this regard who states that:

"Identity has been used in English since about the sixteenth century and its other forms in other European languages has been derived from the late Latin Identities which has two parts: Iden (sameness) and Entities (existence). Identity has been used with five meanings since its advent:

1. The quality or condition of sameness -absolute sameness or Oneness.
2. Individuality, character (since 1638) and individuality (since 1682).
3. (In algebra) equation or expression that is satisfied for all values of the symbols.
4. Recognition in terms of feelings, interests (since 1868). The use of this meaning is limited.
5. What can introduce its owner, such as an identification card (Since 1900.) "(Behzad-far, 2008).

As can be observed, in the second definition of identity used since the mid-seventeenth century (Renaissance), terms of individuality and personality are used. The definition in math emerged at time of scientific growth and the last one (identification card) appeared in industrial slavery era. The spirit of time has an effect on semantic aspects of terms and on the spirit of place.

### Urban Identity

Any part of the earth like any object or organism has its own identity, spirit and unique features, as well as events that can only be found in that place. This brings to mind the difference of difference. For example, Tehran and Isfahan are both cities, but Tehran is a name different from Isfahan. Tehran's identity is formed in our minds through processes of perceiving environment which are different from those of Isfahan (Behzad-far, 2008). Behzadfar states that "our subjective impression of Isfahan is formed by Hezar Jerib orchard, Chahar Bagh, Naqshe Jahan Square, Sabze Meidan Square, Joibar neighborhood, Imam's Mosque and Jame Mosque; while our our subjective impression of Tehran is formed by Darband, Sarband, Sadabad, Vali Asr St.; Hassan Abad, Rah Ahan, Tajrish and Enghelab squares; Bazar and and Sangelach neighborhoods, Imam and Arg Mosques and the like. Our mental image of Isfahan includes sweet Isfahani accent and colorful flowery Chadors, while that of Tehran includes Tehrani accent and Chadors with small flower patterns and simple designs."

In simple words, every corner of the earth like man has a metaphysical aspect besides the physical one. Physical and

metaphysical properties together make every place's identity (Komeili, 2008)

### The importance and necessity of recognizing the identity of a city

The importance and necessity of recognizing the identity of a city can be examined from three aspects:

1. Its importance and necessity for planners and policy makers: The advent of the industrial era and the changes that occurred in human life have led to many events in cities whose impact still remains. Given the damaging effects of this period, knowledge and mastery of planners and policy makers about the structure and identity cities is essential. Increasing urban development calls for urgent civil measures and cities have to accept changes. Failure to understand the main structure of cities and lack of efforts to preserve and restore and rehabilitate it can cause great damage to underlying values of cities and traditional urban patterns across the globe particularly in Iran (Behzad-far, 2008). In general it can be said that without understanding a phenomenon, one cannot intervene to improve it (Habib et al., 2009).

2. Its importance and necessity for travelers and tourists: Basically, some believe that the residents of a place are not the best people who are able to experience and express the spirit of the place. Tourists can do this better. That is because tourists do a purposeful search for experiences of a place (Jiven & Larkhm, 2004 quoted by Mirmoghtadaee). If all cities wear the same clothes and their identities become forgotten, there is nothing new for tourists to look for. Everything is replicated in urban design in this case.

3. Its importance and need for residents: A place that a person identifies with is a part of his personality that makes his individuality. When he thinks about his own place feels an association between him and the place (Behzad-far, 2008). When a city has identity, its residents are proud of where they live and their sense of responsibility towards this place increases. This way, people's needs for security and distinction are satisfied and the place and the residents will care for each other.

### Standards and ways of recognizing the identity of a city

Some scholars call identity "Sense of Place". By definition, the term sense of place is a modern equivalent for the Latin phrase "protective spirit of place" is. Historically, the term does not refer to a physical location. The spirit of place or the uniqueness of place or space is defined by presence or protection of a supernatural existence. Residents or visitors to a place are aware of that existence and respect it (Mirmoghtadaee, 2004). This supernatural existence can have a direct link with the place structure and its material, social and cultural factors. For example, when people heard the name "Venice", they would think of water channels and its physical state unconsciously. When we talk of fashion and clothes, Milan is the first city

glaring in our minds. For Washington, power will appear in our minds.

**General character building components of Kish Island**

Every city like its people is made of two dimensions: physical and metaphysical. Identity components of a city like those of humans have two dimensions: objective or physical and mental or spiritual, which can be distinguished from each other based on natural, artificial and human environments (Behzadfar, 2008). Below, both physical and psychological aspects of Kish Island are examined:

**The physical aspect: (natural and artificial components)**

A - Geographic location and topography: Kish island has a surface area of 90 square kilometers, with an outer boundary of 40kms, and a nearly elliptical shape. It is located in the Persian Gulf 19kms from mainland Iran. The Island is positioned along the 1359km long Iranian coastline north of the Persian Gulf, at the first quarter from the Hormuz entrance to the Gulf. Its longitudinal and latitudinal positions are 2632 and 53.58 degrees respectively. The Island is 15.45kms long

from west coast to the east coast (the distance between Mariam Complex and Hoor field). Its maximum width extending from the southern shorelines to the northern shorelines is 7.5kms (the distance between Gomrok Port and the lighthouse.) The island's surface is flat, lacking mountains or even high hills. (Kish Free Zone Organization, 2012) (Fig.2).

B - Flora and fauna: The geographic location of Kish in the southern Iranian coasts is a narrow strip of dry land with tropical plants (Fig.3).

Because of the hot climate, and the small precipitation, scanty vegetation predominate the Island. The vegetation is savannah like and the dominating plant is the Acacia (Destination Master Plan-Kish island,2005). Palm trees have been present in the island for a long time. "Kish is a 91.5-square-kilometre (35.3 sq mi) resort island where groves and herds of livestock and agricultural lands are found." (Zand quoted in Ibn Khordazbeh<sup>1</sup>, 1996). The island has beaches suitable for nesting of turtles. Two turtle species, the Green Turtle and the Hawksbill Turtle which live on the island are registered in the Red List of the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) as they are critically endangered facing the risk of extinction (Destination Master Plan-Kish island, 2005).

Sea water birds including Greater Flamingo, Cormorant,



Fig. 2 : Geographical status of Kish Island - Source: Google Earth

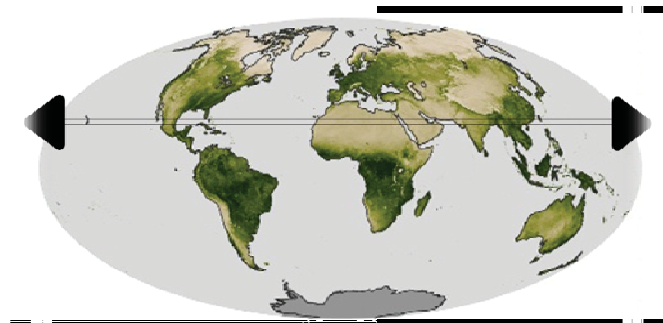


Fig. 3: Dry and Tropical Land Strip (Source: <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov>)

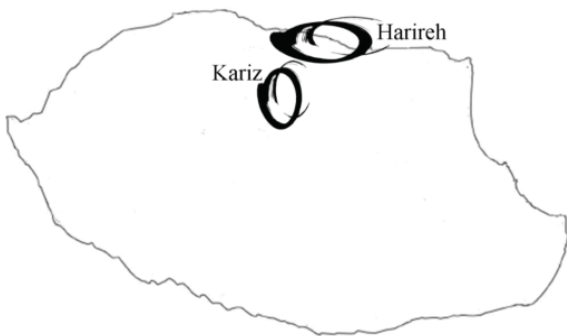


Fig. 4: Structure of the ancient Kish Island  
(Source: The author, 2012)

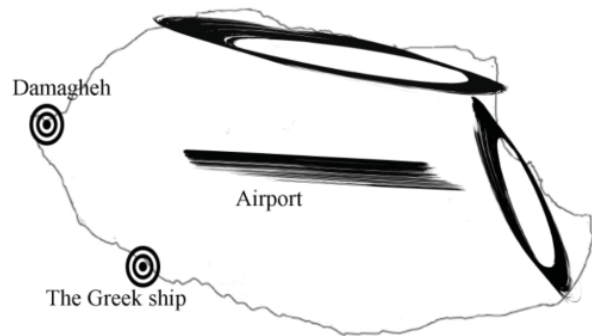


Fig. 6: Current structure of Kish Island

Oystercatcher, Western Reef Heron, Greenshank and Brittle Star alongside animals like Thomson Gazelle and raptors such as Bonelli's Eagle are seen in the island and form part of its fauna (Destination Master Plan-Kish island, 2005).

C-Urban Structure of Kish : North part of Kish presents signs of civilization and life of people in the past which shows that this region was the core of the city (Fig.4).

The old villages of Deh and Dolmeh display these districts. The Masheh district, with time became the more important central business district located on the Upper Eastern band due to the more favorable protected areas, and the sandy beaches offering more favorable settlement conditions. The south and western areas remained relatively uninhabited, with small settlements such as Saffein, Baghou and Fahil developing. (Destination Master Plan-Kish island,2005) (Fig.5).

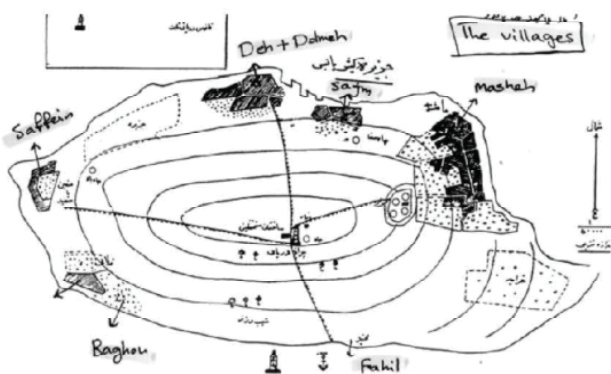


Fig. 5: Structure of the ancient Kish Island  
(Source: Destination Master Plan-Kish island, 2005)

In the current structure of Kish Island, most incidents and constructions have occurred on the east and north parts and the western and southern parts of the Island have remained intact (Fig.6).

Important elements of Kish (focal and point indicators, historical and physical indicators, individual buildings and significant spaces) are: commercial centers (such as Campus 1 and 2, Business Center, Morvarid, Maryam Market.), Greek Ship, Damaghe, educational spaces such as universities in the Island, Dolphin Park, waterfront resorts, Mir Mohanna Park, the Ancient Town of Harireh, Kariz, administrative region, businesses ports and airport.

Content aspects (the human components)

A - Native peoples: these people (the original inhabitants of Kish Island) live in a neighborhood in the northwest called Saffein. They are Muslim and most of them are Sunnis. Their languages are Arabic and Farsi and their main occupations are fishing, boat building and farming. At present, some of these people are working as unskilled workers in commercial, administrative, service and entertainment centers. (Table1)

Native communities in Saffein live in high-density houses with organic architecture which are worn out. Due to its land features such as easy access and connection to the sea, and its potential for agriculture and horticulture, this district has long been the focus of the crowd. It is necessary to mention that a small number of natives of the Island live in the western region in Baghu village (Fig.7).

Table 1: Main occupations of native people in Kish Island

Main occupations of native people in Kish Island	Fishing
	Ship building
	Gardening
	Animal husbandry
	Maritime and Trade





Fig. 7: Geographical location of Saffein

B – History of Kish Island: Based on observations recorded by historians and tourists, Kish Island has always been a harbor for commercial and passenger ships because of its geographical location in the Persian Gulf and in the pathway to destinations such as India and Saudi Arabia as well as its proximity to the coasts of Iran. "Kish Island has been a major commercial markets where traders from India and several other islands have come there to sell their goods. The merchants of Mesopotamia, Yemen and Iran export purple, silk, and linen cloth; cannabis, vetch, wheat, barley, maize and rice to the island" (Zand quoted in Benjamin<sup>2</sup>, 1996). Marco Polo point to the island's potential as a stopover place for marine passengers and mentions pearling as a common occupation in this district (Zand, 1996).

**RESULTS**

*Evaluating components and identifying specific and outstanding traits showing Kish identity*

To better understand the concept of urban identity of Kish,first,

we present a comparison between Kish Island and elsewhere. This will help understand the differences. Without comparison, it is meaningless to talk about the differences and unique identity (Table2).

*Kish in the Master Plan:* the development vision for Kish Island in the Master Plan is to create an Persian Garden (Kish, a Persian Garden in the Persian Gulf). The Plan presents the following reasons for choosing this vision. According to the Plan, the Persian Garden of Kish Island is:

- Full of trees, plants and green parks, giving nature to the Island – partially manmade, partially naturally grown
- A pleasant meeting and strolling place for friends and families
- A place of culture, heritage and even spiritual solitude
- A formal adjunct to houses or places, which it surrounds
- Giving a natural image to the urban structure of the Island
- Showcases the intrinsic unit between man and nature, where man respects, develops but also shapes the nature in a humble and sustainable way.
- A very visual and comprehensible image to be easily conveyed

Table 2: Comparison of Kish Island and other parts of the globe

Kish Island	Other parts of the world
1 – It is a place where people live and flora and fauna are found.	1-1 There are many other areas where human lives and both vegetation and animals are found.
2 - The life in this context is associated with the sea. People living in the city depend on the sea for their life.	1-2 Many cities are associated with the sea and their people's lives are dependent on the sea.
3 – The life which depends on the sea is going on in an island context.	1-3. Similar conditions can be found in many other Islands.
4 -The life which depends on the sea has shaped in a coral island.	1-4 Coral Islands with similar conditions can be named.
5 – But, Kish Island ...	



Fig. 8: Kish port and airport  
(1. Kish International Harbor 2. Kish fishing harbor 3. Kish Airport)  
( Source: www.maps.google.com)

in marketing and promotion

- Easily captured and accepted emotionally by the end consumer (Destination Master Plan-Kish island,2005).

The project, introduces areas with the greatest potential to create a dynamic Island as follows:

1. Tourism and luxury hotels. 2 - Second homeowners. 3 - Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events. 4 - Special Business – Domestic. 5 - Logistics Centre for Oil and Gas. 6 - Information Technology Pilot Project. 7 - Knowledge Center. 8 - Finance Centre. 9 - Export Processing Zone - Regional. 10 - Export of manufactured goods. 11 - Transit -Export (Ibid, 2005).

*Features of Kish Island that has preserved despite becoming up to date:*

In terms of physical aspects (geographic location) and content

aspects Kish Island has been a pearling center and a stopover for commercial ships on their way to Europe, India and other places. The commercial harbor on the north part is now performing the same functions (Fig. 8).

The island's coral reefs and its unique flora and fauna are among features which have long been complemented by different visitors at different periods of time. In terms of human life, a look at the life of native people, who mostly live in Saffein neighborhood, reveals their simple sea dependent life alongside using new concepts like automobiles.

*C - Field research about tourism and passengers' purpose of trip*

One of the methods that can be used to recognize differences between a given place and others is surveying tourists and passengers. Field research done by Drees & Sommer

Table 3: The number of visitors based on purpose of trip to Kish in 2004 and 2012 -  
(Sources: A – Destination Master Plan-Kish island,2005; B - 2012 survey: the Author, field research, 2012).

The number of visitors based on purpose of trip to Kish in 2004		The number of visitors based on purpose of trip to Kish in 2012		The number of visitors based on purpose of trip to Kish in 2012 (the beach is added)	
Business Trips	4%	14%	Business Trips	12%	
Visiting Friends and Relatives	33%	18%	Visiting Friends and Relatives	11%	
Leisure, Sport and	27%	27%	Leisure, Sport, Culture (and the Kish beach)	50%	
					Culture
Shopping, Festivals	27%	30%	Shopping, Festivals	19%	
MICE	3%	4%	MICE	3%	
Health	0%	4%	Health	2%	
Visa Exchangers	5%	3%	Visa Exchangers	3%	
Day Visitors	1%	-	Day Visitors	-	

International in 2005, under the title of Destination Master Plan – Kish Island 2005 – 2025 and again in 2012 by the author have come to conclusions that follows: (Table3)

In the survey, the participants were asked to choose two statements as their purpose of trip to Kish. 84 percent chose the beach as their purpose.

Below are among important points indicated by the above table:

1. Increased number of tourists who go to Kish for commerce and business (from 4% to 14%). This indicates the fact that the Island's name has been recognized as a symbol of tourism among Iranian passengers which has led to an increase in demands and domestic and foreign investments there.
2. Decreased visits of friends and relatives (from 33% to 18%): This is a thought provoking issue that can point to a decrease in population of native people in the Island. A question asked from 43 native individuals (20-45 years old) who have left Kish in recent years to other Iranian cities, shows that over 73 percent of interviewees moved because of unemployment.

### CONCLUSION

The issue of urban identity has been neglected for years under excuses like oldness of these contexts and the need to a new

and modern world and has led to present status of our cities. This does not mean that modernism is a wrong approach, but that the present unfavorable status is the result of lack of proper understanding of the importance of the spirit of time and place in their design. Kish Island has witnessed many constructions due to growth in population and increased demands. High-rise buildings and luxuriant designs are among the basic principles of these constructions which are based on the spirit of time. However, the spirit of place (physical and content aspects) of Kish Island which has its own defined principles has been ignored. Constructions which take into account both the spirit of time and that of place will become part of the city's architecture and become assimilated therein.

To understand a city's urban identity, first, the components creating that identity must be identified. In this study, these components were investigated in terms of physical and content dimensions. (Fig. 9)

In sum, based on findings of the library research and questionnaires it was concluded that 3 groups play a more important role than others in introducing identity-making elements of Kish: 1 - Designers and policy makers, 2 - tourists and visitors, and most importantly 3- residents.

The following table contains the comments of these three

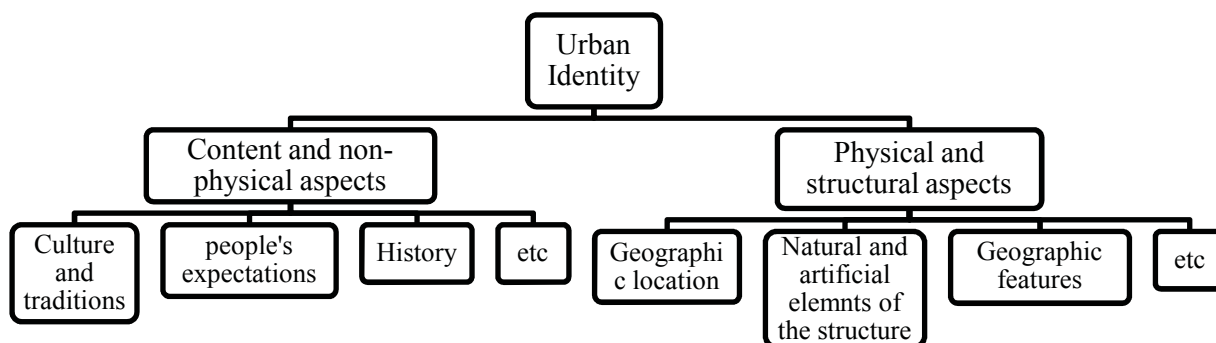


Fig. 9: Components of Urban Identity

Table 3: Comments of policy makers and planners; tourists and residents on the Kish Island identity elements -

Policy makers and planners	Kish Island has one of the unique coral reefs. The place receives many passengers each year because it has become a brand name in tourism among Iranians. The flora and fauna of the island has led to creation of best diving sites on the island. The island is a significant commercial market because it is a free commercial zone.
Tourists	Three top trip purposes for tourists who choose the island as a travel destination are: recreation and the beach, shopping and business and meetings and conferences.
Residents	Residents depend on sea and professions such as shipbuilding, fishing and hunting are integral part of native people's life in the Island. The Island's native people are mostly Iranian Arabs who are mostly Sunni. They believe in their traditions and maintain their culture in the face of modernity.



Table 4 :Identity making elements of Kish Island based on physical and content factors

Physical	Geographic characteristics	Longitudinal and latitudinal positions: 26°32'N 53°58'E. Located on the Persian Gulf (Iranian south waters)
		Coral island
	Physical characteristics	Hot and humid weather (The vapor pressure is high during the year (relative humidity of 50 to 60%)
		Without topographic features like mountains or even high hills.
	Flora and fauna	Plants of hot and dried areas
		Palm trees, native Persian mesquite trees and trees like acacia, Pakistani mesquite and hornbeam.
		Hatchery and habitat for turtles such as Hawksbill and green turtles.
variety of fish species in the Persian Gulf		
Content dimension	History	A stopover on the commercial ships' pathway
		A pearling Place
		Historical attractions such as the historic town of Harireh, Kariz underground city and the Greek ship.
	Culture and people	Most people live in Saffein neighborhood of Kish Island
		Their language is Arabic but they are Iranians.
		They use their traditional dress.
		Most Aboriginal businesses are in direct relationship with the sea, such as shipbuilding, fishing and trading via boat and ship.
		Horticulture and animal husbandry are other native people's occupations.
		People are hospitable, hardworking and simple
		BAGHU village inhabited by a few families is the Kish Island's oldest settlement.

groups in Kish Island study (Table 4).

In general, based on the results of field studies, the elements which make the urban character and identity of the island can be classified as follows in terms of physical and content dimensions (Table 5).

Identity is an integral part of the city's identity just as each person is living with and is recognized by his/her identity. Proper understanding of the spirit and identity of place and combining it with the needs resulting from the spirit of time can help reveal the inner beauty of cities beyond just decorating it. It can open a window for the architecture of Iran and Kish Island.

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1. Persian geographer - 9th century
2. Medieval traveler - 12th century

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