

**Retail Resilience Strategies and Addressing the Urban Retail Areas:****Empirical Evidence from Bandar-e Emam, Khuzestan, Iran**Masoud Jafari<sup>1</sup>, Asra Hosseini<sup>2</sup> and Nahid Nematikutenae<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, Rudehen branch, Islamic Azad University, Rudehen, Tehran, Iran, [mjafari@riau.ac.ir](mailto:mjafari@riau.ac.ir)

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**ABSTRACT:** Spatial concentration of retailing activities is one of the most apparent sorts of contemporary trading and its dynamic development brought by second half of the nineties. Growth of such places have shown a number of challenging parts in urban areas, to deal with some of these issues, an empirical analysis of the management and transformation of retail areas in the region of Bandar-e Emam, Iran has conducted in terms of retail resilience theory. The main aim is to clear up the significance of resilient retail strategies and to offer recommendations through which better achievement in Bandar-e Emam's municipalities can be approachable. The studies conducted in 2011-2012 and a few longer interviews with key actors have been piloted along with other data resources. Results shows in Sadoughi mall, customers mostly arrive by car (85%, tend to visit the center once a week), and where each stay on average lasts for only 1–2 hour. They come regularly every week; the typical customer uses this shopping center as a convenient place to buy ordinary consumer products and groceries, and not as an area for gatherings and events. Finally, a perspective of resilience strategy to better acknowledgement of retail areas in terms of urban and regional planning has been argued.

[Masoud Jafari, Asra Hosseini and Nahid Nematikutenae. **Retail Resilience Strategies and Addressing the Urban Retail Areas: Empirical Evidence from Bandar-e Emam, Khuzestan, Iran.** Life Sci J 2013;10(4s):404-408]. (ISSN: 1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 61

**KEYWORDS:** Retail Resilience, Urban Retail, Resilience Strategy, Bandar-e Emam.

**INTRODUCTION**

Spatial concentration of retailing activities is one of the most apparent sorts of contemporary trading and its dynamic development brought by second half of the nineties (Spilková and Šefrna, 2010). Development and transformation of retailing and related urban areas is a threat to the viability of the city center and to “small-scale businesses”, which are more vulnerable to impacts of urban change (Erkip et al., 2013). In this regards, questions concerning how to manage these kinds of retail transformations in a sustainable manner are becoming increasingly urgent. The present article employs an ecological approach to discuss redevelopment of urban retail in Bandar-e Emam. The resilience strategies of retailing in urban areas is defined here as an adaption to change disasters in different retailing forms, challenging the system's balance to achieve sustainably (Kärrholm et al., 2012). When retailers of different scales are properly located and integrated within urban development plans, with good connections to other land uses, the retail sector is an important agent in maintaining the viability of urban areas and city life (Erkip et al., 2013). Building trade complexes within the cities encountered several difficulties like lack of the empty lands within the marketing area. These markets don't have native and semi-native architectural features; even have caused erosion of physical and social structure of urban areas. Construction of such markets in most cities, especially in small towns was dependent on many factors. The most important was the lack of urban management by city officials who managed the city without planning and supervision, so they encountered *fait accompli*. The number of new large-format retailing areas now is increasing. Nonetheless, the growth of such kind of places have shown a number of challenging parts, such as inner city stagnation, moving commercial activities outside of the cities, moving and travelling difficulties, the need for parking places, loss of lands as a

consequences of large-scale retailing areas, legislative rule of such large-format constructions, health matters, changing customers' behavior and also aesthetic characteristics (Spilková and Šefrna, 2010). This paper concentrates mainly on uncoordinated spatial structure as a result of unplanned retail development in Bandar-e Emam. To deal with some of the issues through an empirical analysis of the management and transformation of retail areas in the region of Bandar-e Emam base on retail resilience theory. The investigation focuses especially on the various strategies of retail development at these places, and to discuss their interdependence to achieve future possible redevelopment plans.

**RETAIL RESILIENCE THEORY**

By developing the concept of spatial resilience (Nyström and Folke, 2001) through a discussion of spatial topologies as introduced by (Law and Mol, 2001), the locally oriented strategies of spatial stabilization has been discussed in the retail areas of Bandar-e Emam. Resilience is often taken to mean the degree to which a certain system is able to tolerate financial, ecological, social and/or cultural change before reorganizing around a new set of structures and processes (Kärrholm et al., 2012). It is an indisputable fact that over the last decades, sustainability and sustainable development (first) and resilience (Slater et al.) have emerged and been consolidated as key principles within territorial planning and governance (Pickett et al., 2004). Resilience has many different meanings, It stems from the areas of physics (where it means the ability of an object to return to its original position after being displaced) and of psychology (signifying the ability to recover from a shock), which associate resilience with the idea of equilibrium. These perspectives have evolved and accept that after a shock

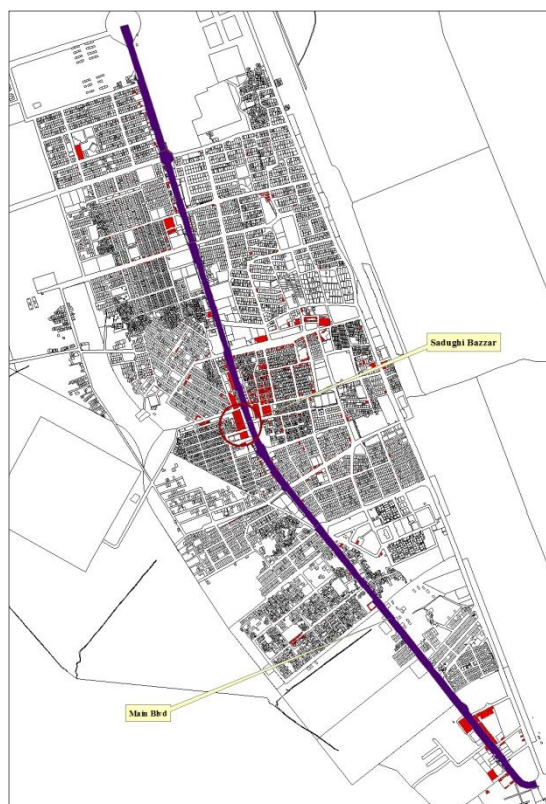
or crisis the ecological systems may not return exactly to their former condition, but rather achieve a new state of balance. In this context, the system's resilience is measured either by the speed of its return to a state of equilibrium (the old or a new one) or by the intensity by which they are able to absorb change (Hudson, 2010). Given this conceptualization of resilience, technical literature provides no consensus regarding its application with regard to cities or urban areas, as these are understood as dynamic products of human processes where places evolve with different rhythms and patterns but do not return to their previous state. Therefore, social sciences have rejected the perspectives of equilibrium and have provided new approaches to resilience, understanding it as an on-going process of adaptation to constantly changing situations which can be considered in different systems, such as urban spaces or retail structures (Fernandes and Chamusca, 2012). For instance, (Simmie and Martin, 2010) defend an evolutionary approach, where space (as a product of human action, social and power relations) is constantly changing and adapting, more or less successfully, to all the threats and pressures that arise from market forces, technological trends or environmental challenges. Therefore, within social sciences, particularly in Geography and in Economics, planning and policies (as well as all the political and economic processes) are seen as central elements of resilience. It has been expressed that resilience lies in the capability of an area to anticipate, arrange for, reply to and improve from a disruption (Foster, 2007). Foster introduces preparation and performance as two type of resilience which are

frequent and overlying in different dimensions of regions including physical /social structures. Resilience is associated to reorganization and to new modes of working, either at institutional level (in new ways of planning and governing in the political, economic and urban areas) and at social level (with regard to the roles citizens and local actors should play in shaping initiatives, spatial strategies and decision-making processes) (Fernandes and Chamusca, 2012). This global and holistic perspective of resilience requires an understanding of the various sub-systems that make up communities, cities or regions, considering the various elements they comprise and the numerous interrelations established between them (Callaghan and Colton, 2008). From this perspective, which is accepted by several social scientists, the resilience of urban retail is considered as being very important in order to understand the dynamics and sustainability of urban systems, as well as the way in which certain urban areas or individual shops may adapt to change (Fernandes and Chamusca, 2012).

## METHODS

### STUDY AREA

Bandar-e Emam with the former name of Bandar-e Shah-pour, is the capital city of Bandar-e Emam Khomeini District in Mahshahr County, Khuzestan Province, Iran (Figure1).



**Figure1.** Sadoughi Bazaar and Main Blvd locations in Bandar-e Emam, Khuzestan, Iran. (Mandan Consulting Engineering Company, 2012)

According to 2006 census, its population was 67,078, in 14,681 families (Wikipedia). Bandar-e Emam Khomeini is a port city on the Persian Gulf in Khuzestan Province, Iran. Before the Iranian Revolution in 1979 it has been known as Bandar-e Shah-pour. Bandar-e Emam and Ahvaz -Khuzestan province center- has the largest economic situation respectively, especially in petrochemical industries. More than 70% of petrochemical production in the country is there and its income is equivalent to three provinces. It has industry giant petrochemical, ports complexes, factories, industries, companies of shipping, transportation

terminals, department of fisheries, shipbuilding enterprises, Petrochemical Special Economic Zone, south shipping lane, steel, 75 thousand ton silo wheat, hundreds of companies, large and small businesses that are located on the south side police station. (Mandan Consulting Engineering Company, 2012) The city is one of the best cities in Iran which is developing more and more every day. Sadoughi Bazaar which has been selected for this research located in the center of the city. This is the big and one of the oldest markets which is the place of trading even for other counties and it has built after sacred war in Iran. The main reason for the

formation of this market was war and its immigrants. The immigrants selected the best location (the margin of the main boulevard of the city) for this market due to having the best condition for public access. Sadoughi market have been established without any standards and criteria, it is very messy, ugly and cannot be reconstruction, in this regards, the need for redevelopment is quiet obvious.

## DATA COLLECTION

Observation studies, questionnaire surveys and interviews conducted in the Sadoughi Bazaar in Bandar-e Emam region. The locations selected, represent shopping environments and include the main pedestrian street in Emam Boulevard, main Bazaar and the regional shopping mall of Sadoughi (Figure2).



**Figure2.** Sadoughi Bazaar and Main Blvd (Photos by Masoud Jafari).

The studies were conducted in 2011-2012 and a few longer interviews with key actors have been conducted along with other data resources. Observation studies and the questionnaires were more focused on investigating possible problems in the places (what works well and less well in terms of management, sales and attractiveness), as well as strategies for the future. The empirical material is not large enough to be truly representative, but was used to give indications of different specificities, and to provide material for the conceptual development. The observation studies were carried out during October and November 2011, always between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., and included statistical estimations, photos, counting of people, estimation of age groups, notes on the different kinds of activities taking place, etc. The questionnaire studies with users were conducted in the afternoon at all sites. The questionnaires were handed out to people passing by at the different places. People seemed most busy at the pedestrian precinct where the pace is higher, and the empirical researcher was often turned down even before contact could be established. At Sadoughi mall, the situation was radically different. At the Sadoughi Mall, people often took the initiative and were willing to have longer discussions. Two kinds of interviews were conducted: longer recorded interviews of about one hour each with some of the key actors : the manager of Sadoughi shopping center, representatives of the municipality and from the housing consulting, and a

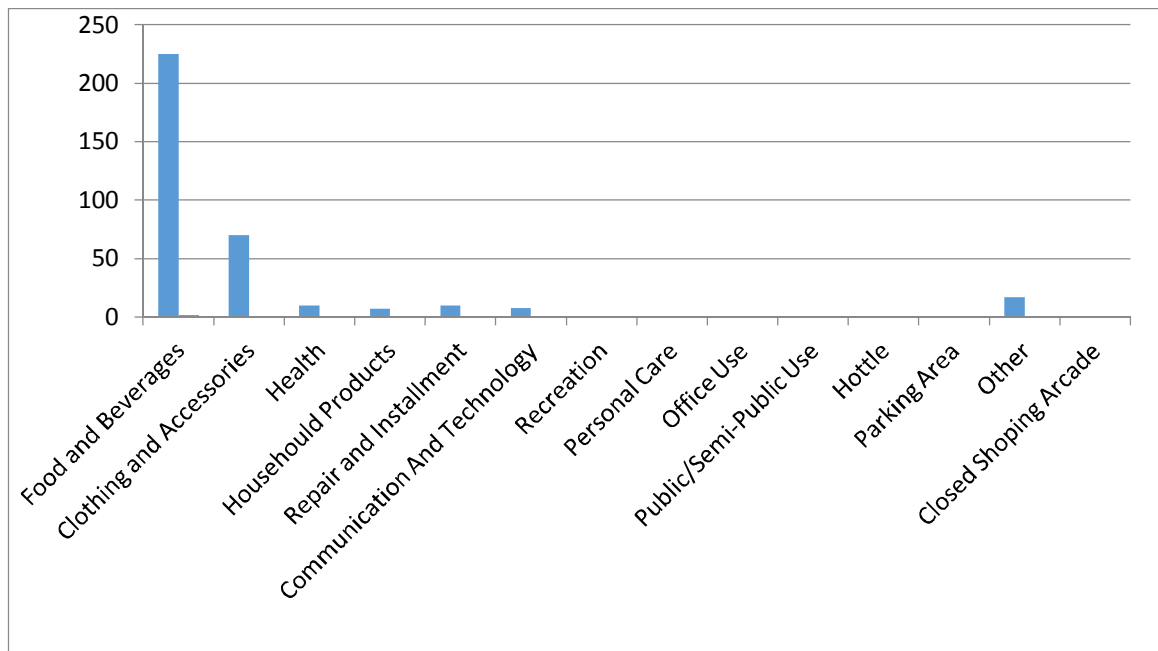
representative of the retailer's organization. Second, 34 short structured interviews were conducted with shop owners or retailers in their stores, where the answers were noted by the interviewer during the interview. The retailers were encouraged to reflect on structural changes over time, customers, competition, problems within business and location, as well as on strategies for the future which have been conducted during September and October 2011.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With have a look at this country's southern cities - Bandar-e Emam- it could be seen that is influenced with its own culture and livelihood and his lifestyle in the city, it depends on the purchase and sale of goods and services has commercial complex on the western fringes of main Boulevard that called Sadoughi Bazaar which is very poor and unsanitary situations and caused inelegant city face in the current transit route and ugly and unbalanced coverage of the city's landscape. In this market, about 350 market units and average area of 10 square meters are made in the border corridors poorly and low-latitude. The market area is 8994.37 square meters in one floor of the building. Considering to the anticipated demolition and renovation factors. Sadoughi mall has included 347 retail parcels. The majority of this shopping center is for food and beverages trading which

has 225 stores, 70 stores for Clothing/accessories and 10

stores for health care (Figure3).



**Figure3.** Distribution of retail groups in the Sadoughi Mall (documented by the project team).

It is also has good connections to regional and local public transport. Sadoughi mall is a place where customers mostly arrive by car (85%, tend to visit the center once a week), and where each stay on average lasts for only 1–2 hour. Customers come regularly every week; the typical customer uses this shopping center as a convenient place to buy ordinary consumer products and groceries, and not as an arena for gatherings and events. The regional attraction of the area was supported by the opening of the Sadoughi mall. In this study, we primarily focused on the southern and busiest part of the precinct. Customers on the pedestrian street seem to visit the place several times a week. Almost half seemed willing to participate in events held at the pedestrian precinct, and most people tended to stay longer here than the visitors to mall. In the questionnaires, a majority of the respondents stated that they live at walking distance from the square and that they normally visit the square every day, some several times a day. In an interview conducted with the mayor of Bandar-e Emam, in March 2012, He expressed the new strategies regarding organizing retailers as follows:

“Barrier crossing is one of the obstacles in Bandar-e Emam which caused difficulties for people. Municipality is assigned for collecting and organizing retailers in various places of the city. Organizing retailers have effective role on increasing products quality and distribution of items and we hope the project of gathering and organizing this class will be finished by working with retailers. Barrier crossing is included: supplying food and goods by lorry, hawkers on the sidewalks and street retailer which should be organized. Municipality should be concerned about people’s worries particularly in city services and services status more and more. Services must not provide dissatisfaction for people during such process. Peddler phenomena and barrier crossing are in the domain of executive function and duties beside municipality in legality and type of activities. Seriously dealing with it and preventing abuse actions of retailers is protecting the civil rights and public culture which is required interaction and cooperation between all relevant executives. Sadoughi Bazaar retailers in the near future are organized and giving more favorable urban services which is the most important priorities of the municipality and we hope officials will help us to reach this goal. Citizens have helped municipality in projects and we hope that this interaction will remain as well”.

The strategies of the individual retailers (according to our interviews) seem to focus on goods, personal service and a good knowledge of the products and retail area of the specific store. There is no guarantee that second generation immigrants will be equally willing to stick to businesses that do not secure a decent living standard (Cachinho, 2012). New measures are therefore needed in order to uphold the service standard on the square. The public authorities are well aware of the situation, and initiatives have therefore been taken by the Bandar-e Emam city planning office and the district administration during the last few years in order to develop a long term strategy for the area (Overview of Bandar-e Emam's comprehensive plan, 2012). The goal is to use changes in the physical structure as a lever for a socially, economically and ecologically resilient development in the Sadoughi bazaar. Densification of the area has been suggested, with new construction as well as workplaces, in order to increase diversity. With the purpose of attracting visitors from the whole city, new and better transport connections to the overall city structure are suggested, with extended cycle paths, as well as new city functions, such as a botanical garden and educational institutions. It also is strengthened with new and better transportation connections with the other squares in the area, a project that will hopefully attract new customers. Extended forms of citizens’ participations have been used in the development of the planning document, and local citizens were given a voice both in terms of problem definitions and suggesting solutions. Our empirical study seems to suggest that the ongoing retail strategies of places include attempts to improve the connections and associations to new customers. The Sadoughi mall interventions, for instance, aimed at attracting customers from the more well-to-do suburbs through social interaction and happenings. At a more general level, however, both the retail strategies implemented yet, and the amenities that the users missed seem to follow the logic of the already existing approaches of each particular retail place. The users’ questionnaires suggest that what people wanted at all the places were more of the things already present, rather than new things. The retail strategies also seemed more focused on ‘getting the place to work’, than on introducing something new. It is true that in the context of their refurbishment, tried to reach a new segment of customers, but this strategy failed and was quickly abandoned. Perhaps, this failure

was also used to justify the more cautious attitude of their recent strategies. Strong, efficient retail organizations seemed to play an important part in the development, especially of retailers' center and the pedestrian precinct.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the present research, variety of data sources such as municipalities report, news, site observations, interview, and consulting companies' reports used to provide a qualitative indication of retailing environments and nearby commercial areas. The theoretical framework which has been used in the present research showed they are complete for practice by both developers and planners. However in the current study in municipal planners' works, retail organizations seem to be no effective attempts to address the interaction between the different retail areas in Bazaar Sadoughi. The serious problems can be seen in the neighborhood square regarding attracting clients and the strategies seemed to aim at enhancing local attraction with new non-retail functions rather than finding ways of addressing people at the urban or regional scale. A perspective of resilience strategy to better acknowledgement of retail areas in terms of urban and regional planning has been applied. The following mentions elements of official plans which could assist retailers in small or large scale to reach resilient retail strategy. To implement official plans for redevelopment of retailing areas, first of all must specify the number of owners who being active in. Surveying and counting shops and to obtain exact statistic and figures, would be very important and effective. On the other hand for economic justification, the project should be planned and designed so that the master of plan is given the interest charge. Since the right of business is belong to the tenant so supplying the tenant's situation is more important than the owner to renovate. So it seems difficulty of the plan in this part is property the tenant rather than the project financing. Several fundamental factors for tenant including: Time of plan implementation, the cost of the plan (whether tenant or owner must pay a fee or not?), the area of available land, Available area location, the location of a business prior to the property before destruction. About the time of plan implementation, operation time of the project is very important due to tenant's will. A very low figure can be received from the tenant or owner. The municipalities have important rule as this project dose not prepare notable earnings, they should be focused on the city face in such areas and provide urban space to citizens which will bring enough benefits to them. In fact, these trade units have their own client and the tenants are not repine about their inappropriate units but contrary to the purchaser and the authorities these situations are not only unpleasant but there also have adverse effects on the amenities and features of the urban area and definition of urban space rules. One incentive which can stimulate and encourage landlord or tenant is the extra area of their units which they will earn after plan, so this area should be increased and the municipality requires serious decision about this matter. The business location will not change after plan but since the plan is designed unlike the present situation, all units have equal value, so they will not insist about the former location of their unit. A number of possibilities arise with more research on resilience retail development, first of all, this research evaluated basically for Sadoughi Bazaar. A complete research of all areas would certainly need beneficially to provide precise recommendations for Bandar-e Emam in the future trends. Subsequently, the study considered the mall at one particular time and did not do a comparison

of the current situation of each shop compared to prior retailing areas. Further study most probably can present much better understanding by investigating the development of the region, block, site and neighborhood resilience requirements over a period of time and through longitudinal study along with the recently established places. Researches might be pursued with large-scale retailers to provide a comparison to Sadoughi mall. Finally, a potential work would include thoughtful considering of the resilience requirements for achievable developments in study area and growth on large-scale retailers in different towns. The positive results of resilience policies would be assessed by associating newly established stores to previous positions. However, mixed effect of planners, policy makers, designer, architects, engineers and retailers could be resulted in discovering of the potential of resilience retail strategy. It has been emphasized that changing of city image in this place and also creation and development of urban retail spaces were objectives and main perspective of this research.

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