

The third cycle: A renewed endeavour to reform urban heritage assemblage

A glimpse on the political terrain after the conservative government 2005–2013

With the return of a reformist administration in 2013, the unfinished legal processes and urban planning projects of 1997–2005 were resumed. The reformist bureaucrat-academics who had retreated to universities during Ahmadinejad's administration regained their seats in municipalities, city councils, and government organizations. However, throughout its term, the reformist government experienced a sense of *déjà vu*—their reform initiatives swiftly faced conservative opposition, much like those of the Khatami government in 1997. In 2019, the Revolutionary factions ramped up accusations of corruption to towards the reformists and their projects. At the same time, political escalation with foreign powers and the threat of a power vacuum following the possible passing of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic (82 years old at the time) prompted the state to go on the defensive with further militarization.²⁷⁰

Under the "unified rule"²⁷¹ that came with the new hardliner government in 2021, seats in the Islamic Parliament and city councils, as well as governor and mayoral appointments, went to IRGC members and former or active military officers. Consequently, the reform-minded bureaucrat-academics who had been working in the Ministry of Urban Development, municipalities, and city councils returned to their academic posts. Some who played influential roles in urban heritage planning and conservation sought to continue their unfulfilled projects through civic

270 Mahjoob Zweiri and Aljohara AlObaidan, 'The Second Succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Change or Continuity?', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 23, no. 3 (2021): 473–89.

271 Following Ebrahim Raisi's victory in the presidential elections of 2021, a solidified hardline control over all government branches materialized, referred to as 'hokoomat-e yekdast', which is translated as 'unified rule' in this book.

activities, resulting in the recent active engagement of former bureaucrat-academics in the public sphere.

The urban regeneration programme: An ill-fated attempt to territorialize urban heritage

In 2013, the reformist Ministry of Roads and Urban Development (MRUD)²⁷² re-initiated the urban regeneration programme as a follow-up to its urban planning policies that had been shelved when President Ahmadinejad took office in 2005.²⁷³ The MRUD Minister described the resumed policies as a reform that would initiate a transition in urban planning to a participatory governance approach. This approach promised to give historic cities a new spatial and economic role through urban regeneration [*bazafarini-ye shahri*].²⁷⁴ In line with the academic argument that the intertwining of political leadership and urban administration (as a scientific and professional process) is a shortcoming of the Iranian urban planning system,²⁷⁵ Akhundi, the Minister, pointed to cultural and economic globalization when talking about urban governance,²⁷⁶ a process in which central governments must allow cities to

272 As part of the decentralization policies the two ministries of Housing and Urban Development and Roads and Transportation were merged into the new Ministry of Roads and Urban Development in 2011.

273 I conducted an interview with Mohammad Saied Izadi in Tehran on January 7, 2020.

274 Majid Ghamami, ed., 'Goftegu Ba Doktor Abbas Akhundi [A Conversation with Dr. Abbas Akhundi]', in *Barresi-Ye Vaziyat-e Shahr-sazi va Barnamehrizi Shahri va Mantaghei Da Iran-e Moaser [Observations on the State of Urban Planning and Urban and Regional Management in Contemporary Iran]* (Tehran: Afrand Publishing House, 2013), 13–31.

275 Abbas Akhundi et al., 'Asib Shenasi-e Model-e Edarey-e Omur-e Shahr Dar Iran [A Diagnosis of the Model of Urban Management in Iran]', *Pajouheshhay-e Joghrafiyai* 40, no. 63 (2007): 135–56.

276 Ibid.

become independent of national economies and develop as economic and socio-spatial entities in their own right.²⁷⁷

Akhundi²⁷⁸ and many other reform-minded bureaucrat-academics²⁷⁹ acknowledged that, in spite of 'cosmetic policies' towards public participation in Iran, the central state has always resisted its actual implementation. However, they offered no solution to the challenge of Iranian cities seeking economic and cultural independence in a theocracy ruled by a set of state and parastatal power centres.²⁸⁰

In support of the regeneration programme, universities and institutions to which these bureaucrat-academics were affiliated became involved in the urban regeneration assemblage. Interviews with several conservation graduates and archival research²⁸¹ indicate that the topic of urban regeneration became particularly popular, for instance, at the University of Tehran between 2011 and 2019.²⁸²

277 For background on the concept of urban governance and the challenges of implementing it, see: Ade Kearns and Ronan Paddison, 'New Challenges for Urban Governance', *Urban Studies* 37, no. 5–6 (2000): 845–50.

278 Chamami, 'Goftegu Ba Doktor Abbas Akhundi [A Conversation with Dr. Abbas Akhundi]'.

279 See, for example, the chapters written by actors in the academic and governmental realms of urban planning in Iran in: *Hokmravai-e Novin Shahri (ruykard-ha, mafahim, masael, va chalesh-ha) [New Urban Governance (approaches, concepts, Issues, and challenges)]*, vol. 1 and 2 (Tehran: Tisa, 2017).

280 See the section: An overview of the political landscape in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution.

281 Based on the thematic analysis of doctoral and master's dissertations available on the Iranian Research Institute for Information Science and Technology (IranDoc) repository. The Institute is affiliated with the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT), 'IranDoc', 2020, <https://en.irandoc.ac.ir>.

282 Also see translated academic books such as: Peter Roberts and Hugh Sykes, *Urban Regeneration: A Handbook*, trans. Mohammad Saeid Izadi and Pirooz Hanachi (University of Tehran Press, 2014).

Iranshahr: A short-lived theoretical experiment in urban regeneration²⁸³

One policy of the reformist MRUD was to invest in the pre-Islamic model of 'Iranshahr' in the belief it would provide a theoretical framework for directing Iran's urban regeneration programme toward urban and regional equilibrium.²⁸⁴ The concept goes back to the pre-Islamic Sassanid Dynasty (3rd century AD) who used this term for their political territory, which stretched from the Oxus to the Euphrates. In administering Iranshahr, they followed Zoroastrian principles of balance and tolerance in dealing with the various ethnic groups, religions, and natural environments.²⁸⁵

Mohammad Saeid Izadi, who held the position of Deputy Minister of MRUD at that point in time said in an interview: ²⁸⁶

We wanted to start from a solid theoretical basis. So, with the support of the Minister, we proceeded with a theoretical experiment at MRUD. Most of our colleagues at the universities refused to support us, arguing that a Ministry was a place for executing measures and not for theoretical work.

Having said that, it is crucial to note the inherent risks of engaging in theoretical discourse within a ministry, particularly when incorporating the controversial Iranist ideas of philosopher and political theorist Javad Tabatabai. Tabatabai's proposition, advocating for the adoption of the ancient pre-Islamic governance model of Iranshahr as a potential means of harmonizing Iran's present-day ethnic, cultural, and environmental

283 Here, I expand on my previously published work on the subject. See: Yadollahi, 'Tracing the Identity-Driven Ambitions of the Iranian Urban Conservation Apparatus'.

284 UDRC, 'Iranian Urban Development And Revitalization Corporation Operation Report (2013–2017)' (MRUD, 2017).

285 See: Touraj Daryaei and Khodadad Rezakhani, *From Oxus to Euphrates: The World of Late Antique Iran*, Ancient Iran Series (H&S MEDIA, 2016).

286 I conducted an interview with Mohammad Saied Izadi in Tehran on January 7, 2020. He was Deputy Minister between 2013 and 2017, Deputy Minister of Architecture and Urban Planning between 2017–2019 and the director of the Applied Research centre of UDRC.

dynamics, came too close to echoing a call to replace the Islamist model of governance.²⁸⁷

Public events and newspaper interviews indicate that high-ranking bureaucrat-academics, including the MRUD Minister Abbas Akhundi and his deputies, kept a close eye on Tabatabai's theory.²⁸⁸ For instance, Akhundi, stated in an interview that "returning to the Iranshahr identity" would be his main approach for urban regeneration.²⁸⁹ In another interview, he argued that the re-investigation of Iranshahr could facilitate dealing with the crisis of identity, liveability, and mobility in contemporary Iranian cities.²⁹⁰ He believed that his approach included "Iran, Islam, and modernity all together".²⁹¹ Also, Izadi, the Deputy Minister of MRUD and Director of the Urban Regeneration Company of Iran (former HDCC) said that the accurate understanding of Iranshahr could be "the missing link in the chain of [their] previous attempts in dealing with the social and environmental complexities of Iranian cities".²⁹²

Moreover, the MRUD-associated Urban Regeneration Company of Iran (URC) organized a series of discussions in Tehran, Qazvin, Yazd, Isfahan, and other cities about possible applications of the model to address issues around "good governance", the "liveability of cities", and

287 Javad Tabatabai, *Khajeh Nezam-al-Molk* (Tehran: Tarh-e Now, 1996); Javad Tabatabai, 'Iran be onvan-e Iranshahr [Iran as Iranshahr]' (Twenty-fourth Meeting of the Iransharian Thought and Civilization, Tehran, 10 March 2017).

288 He was invited to speak in the 24th session of the lecture series on 'Iranshahr Thought and Civilization' [*Selseleh neshasthay-e Andisheh va Tamaddon-e Iranshahr*], held by the MRUD and UDRC.

289 Abbas Akhundi, 'Barnamey-e Melli-e Baz-Afarini-e Shahri Be Chalam-e Abbas Akhundi [The National Urban Regeneration Agenda, by Abbas Akhundi]', *UN Habitat-Iran*, 2018, para. 3, <http://unhabitat.org.ir/?p=4708>.

290 Abbas Akhundi, 'An Interview with the Minister of MRUD', *MRUD News Service*, 2018, <http://news.mrud.ir/news/51902/>.

291 *ibid.*, para. 33.

292 MRUD News Service, 'A Report of the Meeting Series on The Critique of Architecture and Urban Planning', *MRUD News Service*, 2018, para. 3, <http://news.mrud.ir/news/50242/>.

“citizenship rights” in contemporary Iran.²⁹³ Abbas Akhundi, Beheshti Shirazi (the former director of the ICHO), Mohsen Habibi, Professor of Urban Planning at the University of Tehran, and Javad Tabatabai were among the speakers. Outside of Iran, historian Touraj Daryaee²⁹⁴ also published on the concept of Iranshahr²⁹⁵ and talked about it in news and academic publications and on social media.²⁹⁶ In line with MRUD’s ‘good governance’ policies, Urban Dialogue Houses were founded in cities like Tehran, Gorgan, and Tabriz²⁹⁷ to “encourage civic engagement and build public trust” in historic city centres.²⁹⁸

The concept of Iranshahr came under fierce attack from conservative thinkers, who accused the reformists of promoting Western views of liberalism that diverge from Islamic Revolutionary ideology.²⁹⁹ In the midst of the pandemonium of ideological and political disputes and despite lobbying by well-known professionals and academics in urban

293 See the reports: UDRC, ‘Iranian Urban Development And Revitalization Corporation Operation Report (2013–2017)’.

294 Maseeh Chair in Persian Studies & Culture, History, University of California, Irvine

295 Daryaee and Rezakhani, *From Oxus to Euphrates: The World of Late Antique Iran*.

296 In 2020 and 2021, Daryaee reached out to public audience in several Instagram live streams around the topic of Iranshahr. Also see: Touraj Daryaee, Iranshar Tavahom va Eghragh Nist [Iranshahr is Neither an Illusion nor an Exaggeration], 27 October 2020, Etemad Newspaper.

297 For instance, see: Parliament of Iran, ‘Ghanun-e Barnamey-e Chaharom-e Tose-Ey-e Eghtesadi, Ejtemai va Farhangi-e Jomhuriy-e Eslami-e Iran [The Law of the Fourth Plan of Economic, Social and Cultural Development of Islamic Republic of Iran]’.

298 Mohammad Saeid Izadi, ‘Rah Andazi-Ye Khane-Ha-Ye Gofteman-e Shahri Rahi Bara-Ye Maremat-e Baft-Ha-Ye Tarikhi [Establishment of Urban Dialogue Houses, an Approach to the Preservation of Historic Cities]’, *ISNA*, 19 November 2016, isna.ir/xCY47c.

299 For instance in: Mashregh, ‘Ideology-Zodai Az Shahr, Barname-Ye Asli-Ye Es-lahtalaban Bara-Ye Tehran/ Chera Hanachi Haman Akhundi Ast? [Ideological Cleansing, the Reformists’ Main Program for Tehran / Why Hanachi Is the Very Same as Akhundi?]’, *Mashregh News*, 18 October 2018; Mohammad Mohsen Rahemi, ‘Iranshahri Mordeh Ast [Iranshahri Is Dead]’, *Farhikhtegan*, Islamic Azad University, 20 October 2018, <http://fdn.ir/23522>.

planning and architecture, and sociology the Urban Dialogue House of Tehran (also known as Vartan House)³⁰⁰ was labelled a "house of corruption" and was closed down in 2019.³⁰¹

The wider problem of the Iranshahr model was that it ran counter to the metanarrative of the Islamic Republic's cultural policy, which can be found, for instance, in the policies of the High Council of the Cultural Revolution, that aimed at cultural engineering.³⁰² Cultural engineering was defined as "the process of recognizing, diagnosing, purifying and advancing culture and its directions based on the authentic Islamic-Iranian identity".³⁰³ In a joint decree with Ahmadinejad, a Cultural Engineering Map was issued to provide cultural infrastructure for realizing the goals of Islamic society.³⁰⁴ Cultural engineering was implemented in the digital and physical public spheres, targeting Iranian citizens, Farsi-speaking societies, state organizations, the Islamic world, neighbouring countries, and allies and enemies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. National measures foreseen by the document included the development of cultural spaces to promote the heritage of Sacred Defence, the country's achievements and progress in science and culture, as well as the works of past and present Iranian scientists.

300 After the building's Iranian-Armenian architect, Vartan Hovanessian.

301 Drawing on the author's online and offline ethnographic research related to the campaign against the closure of the Vartan House. The participants (professionals and planners from the Municipality of Tehran and the University of Tehran) preferred to remain anonymous.

302 The High Council of the Cultural Revolution had been pursuing the project of cultural engineering since the mid-2000s in a scholarly journal with the same title.

303 High Council of Cultural Revolution and Mahmud Ahmadinejad, 'Mosavabe-Ye Naghshe-Ye Mohandesi-Ye Farhangi-Ye Keshvar [Decree on the Cultural Engineering Map of the Country]' (Parliament of Iran-Research Centre, 2013), pt. 1 (6), Parliament of Iran-Research Centre.

304 High Council of Cultural Revolution and Ahmadinejad, 'Mosavabe-Ye Naghshe-Ye Mohandesi-Ye Farhangi-Ye Keshvar [Decree on the Cultural Engineering Map of the Country]'.

Figure 26: The courtyard of the Urban Dialogue House of Tehran, also known as Vartan House, decorated with a mural depicting an epic story from the Shahnameh³⁰⁵ about the legendary Iranian prince, Siavash remembering his homeland, Iranshahr



Author, 2019

The Fifth and Sixth Development Plans also emphasized the role of the High Council of the Cultural Revolution in cultural engineering.³⁰⁶

305 National epic of Greater Iran, written by Abolghasem Ferdowsi (10th-11th century).

306 Parliament of Iran, 'Ghanun-e Barnamey-e Panjom-e Tose-Ey-e Eghtesadi, Ejtemai va Farhangi-e Jomhuriy-e Eslami-e Iran [The Law of the Fifth Plan of Economic, Social and Cultural Development of Islamic Republic of Iran]', *The Official Magazine: Rooznameh-e Rasmi-e Keshvar*, 2011; Parliament of Iran, 'Ghanun-e Barnamey-e Sheshom-e Tose-Ey-e Eghtesadi, Ejtemai va Farhangi-e Jomhuriy-e

This included the further support of the establishment of 'fame museums' that played a role in strengthening national pride and advancing the heritage of the Sacred Defence.³⁰⁷ Also the reuse of houses of Islamic and Revolutionary figures such as Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani,³⁰⁸ Ali Shariati,³⁰⁹ and Seyyed Hassan Modarres³¹⁰ in Tehran as 'museum-houses' were projects of this kind. With the IRGC's military involvement in post-ISIS Syria, the ideology of Sacred Defence previously applied to the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, was extended to the defence of sacred Shia shrines in the region.³¹¹

One of the sharpest attacks to the Iranshahr model came from a member of the High Council of Cultural Revolution, Hossein Kechuyan, who challenged Tabatabai in a debate to accept that his theory placed Iranian identity above Islamic identity.³¹² He suggested that Tabatabai

Eslami-e Iran [The Law of the Sixth Plan of Economic, Social and Cultural Development of Islamic Republic of Iran], *The Official Magazine: Rooznameh-e Rasmi-e Keshvar*, 2017.

307 A guideline for the reuse of public historical properties was issued: The Council of Ministers, 'Ayin-Nameh-Ye Amval-e Farhangi Honari va Tarikhi-Ye Nahad-Ha-Ye Omumi va Dolati [Code for Cultural, Artistic and Historical Properties of Public and State Institutions]' (Parliament of Iran, 2003).

308 One of the founding leaders of the Islamic Republic and the fourth president of Iran from 1989 to 1997.

309 A key Islamic Revolutionary ideologue.

310 The Modarres museum was financed by the property and industry magnate Ali Ansari, one of the founders of Tat Bank during Ahmadinejad's term. The Tat Bank was dissolved due to misappropriation accusations and lack of transparency. Ansari later founded Future Bank, which was also implicated in embezzlement accusations that were denied by Ansari's conservative allies. See: Radio Farda, 'Hame-Ye Janjal-Ha-Ye Iran Mall va Ali Ansari [All the Controversies of "Iran Mall" and Ali Ansari]', Radio Farda, 22 April 2019, <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/Iran-mall-controversies/29896562.html>.

311 Hassan Ahmadian and Payam Mohseni, 'Iran's Syria Strategy: The Evolution of Deterrence', *International Affairs* 95, no. 2 (2019): 341–64.

312 Tasnim, 'Ezharat-e Kechuyan Darbareh-Ye Monazereh-Ash Ba Seyyed Javad Tabatabai+Film[Kechuyan's Statements on His Debate with Seyed Javad Tabatabai + Video]', *Tasnim News Agency*, 6 January 2014, 29.10.2020, <https://tn.ai/387906>.

would not admit the logical conclusion of his concept (a nationalist, secular approach to government) for fear of its political consequences. Kechuyan further argued that Iranshahr would be impossible in Iran because its understanding of identity contradicted the metanarrative in the Islamic Republic, which drew its identity from the “defence of the holy shrines”. A member of the Institute of Humanities and Cultural Studies, affiliated with the Ministry of Science, Seyyed-Javad Miri, also took a similar position against Tabatabai, accusing him of promoting archaic and nationalistic ideas that were contradictory to the ruling forces in the Islamic Republic.³¹³ The theoretical conflict was soon followed by major changes in urban planning administration.

Figure 27: Seyyed Hassan Modarres's Museum-house, Tehran



Author, 2021

313 Seyyed-javad Miri, 'Seyyed Javad Tabatabai Be Donbal-e Bastangerai Ast [Seyyed Javad Tabatabai Is Goal Is Seeking Archaism]', *The Great Islamic Encyclopedia*, 2016, <https://www.cgie.org.ir/fa/news/127659>; Ghasem Pourhassan, Seyyed-javad Miri, and Mohammad-Ali Moradi, 'Naghd va Barresi-e Andishey-e Iranshahri [Reflecting on the Iranshahri Thought]' (Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, Tehran, 31 October 2017), <https://www.aparat.com/v/OJa3t>.

Administrative and spatial components of the urban regeneration assemblage

Similar to its theoretical component, the administrative component of urban regeneration also was reinforced or undermined, depending on whether reformists or conservatives were in power. In line with urban regeneration policies, the reform-oriented High Council of Architecture and Urban Planning (HCAUP) called for the revision of 168 cities' Master Plans. For this purpose, and under the Law of Safeguarding the Revitalization, Rehabilitation and Renovation of Decayed and Dysfunctional Urban Fabrics,³¹⁴ the National Urban Regeneration Document was prepared by the MRUD, the ICHHTO and the High Council of Provincial Governors.³¹⁵ This actually marked the continuation of the unfinished project initiated by HDCC during President Khatami's administration. According to Izadi, the MRUD team insisted on including heritage and conservation in the urban regeneration programme despite the sceptical stance and resistance of most of the organizations involved.³¹⁶

A multi-organizational committee for urban regeneration called the National Headquarters was thus established, and its provincial branches started to operate. Within the framework of the Sixth National Development Plan,³¹⁷ the urban regeneration programme aimed to address the "qualitative" social complexities at the neighbourhood level.³¹⁸ So-

314 Parliament of Iran, 'Ghanun-e Hemayat Az Ehya, Behsazi va Nosai-e Bafthaye Farsudeh va Nakaramad-e Shahri [The Law of Safeguarding the Revitalization, Rehabilitation and Renovation of Decayed and Dysfunctional Urban Fabrics]', 2011, art. 16.

315 Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, 'Sanad-e Melli-e Rahbordi-e Ehya, Behsazi va Nosazi va Tavanmandsazi-e Bafthaye Farsudeh va Nakaramad-e Shahri [The National Strategic Document for Revitalization, Rehabilitation, Renovation, and Reinforcement of Deteriorated and Dysfunctional Urban Fabrics]'.
316 I interviewed him in Tehran, on January 7, 2020.

317 Parliament of Iran, 'Ghanun-e Barnamey-e Sheshom-e Tose-Ey-e Eghtesadi, Ejtemai va Farhangi-e Jomhuriy-e Eslami-e Iran [The Law of the Sixth Plan of Economic, Social and Cultural Development of Islamic Republic of Iran]'.

318 Mentioned by senior directors of Urban Regeneration Company, Izadi and Ashayeri in public interviews, for instance: 'Bazafarini Mavane va Rahkar-Ha

ciologist Parviz Piran cooperated with the MRUD and the Municipality of Tehran to establish the theoretical and administrative imperatives for participative planning at a neighbourhood level.³¹⁹ Private urban planning consultants, also known as Neighbourhood Development Offices (NDOs),³²⁰ who were subordinate to the municipalities, were assigned to the historic districts to mediate between the local communities, stakeholders, and the government authorities and to facilitate participatory planning.³²¹

As mentioned, the Sixth National Development Plan committed the MRUD and the ICHHTO to work together within the urban regeneration programme. Relying on this partnership, the ICHHTO announced buffer zones across historic urban areas in 2015. This was an exceptional opportunity, as zoning regulations that the ICHHTO had been pushing for since the mid-2000s had not been approved due to opposition from

[Bazafarini Obstacles and Solutions], *Titr-e Emshab-e Khabar [Tonight's Headlines]* (Tehran: IRINN, 30 April 2018), Fieldnotes; Mohammad Saeid Izadi, Interview with Mohamad Saied Izadi in Tehran, 7 January 2020, BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg, Chair of Urban Management.

- 319 Parviz Piran, *Az Shoma Harekat Az Khoda Barekat, Tose'e-Ye Mosharekat Mabna va Mosharekat Mehvar Dar Iran: Mored-e Tehran [God Helps Those Who Help Themselves: Participatory Local Development in Iran: The Case of Tehran]* (Tehran: Sazman-e Nosazi-e Tehran, 2010); Seyyed Mojtaba Mousavian, 'Gozaresh-e Neshast-Ha-Ye Takhasosi-Ye Sherkat-e Madar Takhasosi-Ye Omran va Behsazi-Ye Shahri-Ye Iran [Seminars in Iranian Urban Development and Revitalization Corporation (Session 3rd & 4th)]', *HaftShahr* 4, no. 47–48 (2015): 138–45.
- 320 Under the Bazafarini Programme, the role of Tehran Urban Renewal Facilitators, who had been working in Tehran since 2008, was revised. See: Kaveh HAJALIABARI and Amir SHAFIE, *Tose-Ye Mahalli: Chaharchoobi Bara-Ye Mahalleh-Ha-Ye Nakaramad [Neighborhood Development: A Framework for Dysfunctional Neighbourhoods]* (Tehran: Research and Planning Centre of Municipality of Tehran, 2018).
- 321 During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to interact with the NDOs in Tehran and Yazd. They were young planners, environmentalists, and social workers who dealt with the everyday problems of the population living and working in the most troubled neighbourhoods. Their task included contributing to the development of guidelines for urban regeneration by submitting their local observations and proposed solutions to the municipal authorities.

the MRUD, municipalities, and provincial governors during the administration term of the conservatives. With the approval of buffer zones in urban Master Plans, heritage authorities hoped to preserve the visual integrity of historic areas by controlling density selling. The enactment of the Law on Promotion of Restoration and Revitalization of Historic-Cultural Urban Fabrics also helped in this regard.³²² Under this law, heritage authorities could mobilize private investors, banks, and even major para-governmental organizations, such as the Housing Foundation of the Islamic Revolution (Bonyad-e Maskan), to invest in the preservation and reuse of historic sites. If implemented, these legal instruments could mark a pinnacle in the territorialization of urban conservation under unified national regulations.

However, the course of events in several cities showed that pro-urban heritage laws and policies were not economically compelling enough to be taken forward by local development forces. The discontent of local administrations and key stakeholders in city centres, such as municipalities, private developers, and Awqaf administrators, had actually been predictable, as many had expressed their opposition during the early negotiations in the drafting of the National Urban Regeneration Document.

With the exception of Yazd, which was a World Heritage tourist city, the legal and administrative assemblage of urban regeneration and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism (MCHHT)³²³ proved ineffective in many cities in the face of rising conservation costs and property prices that were subject to hyperinflation.³²⁴ This was later exacerbated by several factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the frequent anti-government protests from December 2017 to

322 Parliament of Iran, 'Ghanun-e Hemayat Az Maremmat va Ehyay-e Bafthay-e Tarikhi-Farhangi [The Law on Promotion of Restoration and Revitalisation of Historic-Cultural Urban Fabrics]', 2019.

323 The ICHHTO became a ministry in 2019.

324 In 2019, Iran's inflation stood at 39.9 percent, rising to 43.4 percent by 2021. See: International Monetary Fund, International Financial Statistics and data files., 'Inflation, Consumer Prices (Annual %) – Iran, Islamic Rep.' (World Bank), accessed 4 January 2023, <https://cutt.ly/NzjWok>.

September 2022, which caused serious economic and political instability in Iran, impacting both the housing and tourism sectors.³²⁵

In this political and economic climate, the sudden density selling restrictions shocked municipalities and developers, who argued that heritage zoning laws were merely prohibiting development without offering reasonable solutions. The issue of national heritage status became more than ever a misfortune for the owners of historic buildings and those who owned properties in the buffer zones.

Apart from these economic conflicts, the political and ideological struggles of recent years have also contributed to the de-territorialization of the still embryonic urban heritage assemblage. Following disagreement with President Rohani, MRUD Minister Akhundi resigned in 2018,³²⁶ and the key players in the urban heritage and regeneration assemblage were replaced by new officials who worked in accordance with overarching state policies. In a process of establishing unified rule, the hardliners gradually took over parliamentary seats, as well as ministry and city council appointments between 2019 and 2021.

The Urban Regeneration National Headquarters was dissolved, although the provincial committees continued to operate. By 2021, most of the NDOs were also gradually dissolved. Akhundi was accused of pursuing a personal and political agenda with the Iranshahr model.³²⁷ In par-

325 Zahed Ghaderi et al., 'Crisis-Resilience of Small-Scale Tourism Businesses in the Pandemic Era: The Case of Yazd World Heritage Site, Iran', *Tourism Recreation Research*, 2022, 1–7; Fahimeh Hateftabar and Jean Michel Chapuis, 'The Influence of Theocratic Rule and Political Turmoil on Tourists' Length of Stay', *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 26, no. 4 (2020): 427–41.

326 Also, his nomination to run in the 13th presidential elections was rejected by the Guardian Council. See: Abbas Akhundi, 'Matn-e Kamel-e Estefa-Ye Abbas Akhundi [The Complete Text of Abbas Akhundi's Resignation]', *Ensafnews*, 20 August 2018, <https://cutt.ly/zzf92PN>.

327 Abbas Akhundi, 'Name-Ye Sarih-e Akhundi Be Rohani/ Dar Chenin Fazai Joz Naomidi, Forupashi Hambastegi-Ye Ejtemai va Nazar Shodan-e Iran Ayande-Ye Digari Nemitavan Entezar Dasht [Open Letter from Akhundi to Rouhani/ In Such an Atmosphere, Nothing Can Be Expected but Despair, the Collapse of Social Solidarity, and the Devolution of Iran.]', *Khabaronline*, 13 June 2021, khabaronline.ir/xgY7W.

ticular, the acquisition and reuse of historic houses was criticized as an opportunity for the high-ranking stakeholders at the reformist MRUD to profit through rents. The former Minister and his team's interest in heritage was therefore deemed as incompatible with MRUD's original mission, which was urban development and housing. Some actors from the heritage sector, the municipalities, and academia believed that urban regeneration projects were not so different from the previous renewal projects in practice.³²⁸

In the name of protecting private property rights, density selling was once again relaxed in many cities. For instance, in Tehran, although the city council had advocated the enforcement of buffer zone regulations in 2017, the new hardliner city council loosened the regulations after 2021.³²⁹ This brought in massive income for municipalities and parastatal owners of religious areas in historic city centres. Also, in Mashhad³³⁰ and Isfahan,³³¹ the HCAUP's legal warnings cease illegal demolitions were stonewalled by local players. Many believed that the flexible approach of the new heritage minister towards urban heritage

328 Based on fieldnotes at the expert meeting on 'Experiences of Writing Guidelines for Historic Fabrics (the case of Qome presented by Pardaraz Consulting Engineers)', organized by Tehran Municipality, Mehraban Historic House, Tehran, 27 January 2020; And fieldnotes at the 'First National Symposium on Conservation and Management of Urban Heritage', organized by the Research Center of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, Tehran, February 12–13, 2022.

329 I witnessed this shock in Tehran during my field research in the city centre and in my discussions with the Neighbourhood Development Offices.

330 'Hayahoo-Ye Takhrib-e Asar-e Tarikhi Dar Mashhad Nooshdaru-Ye Bad Az Marg-e Sohrab [The Belated Outcry Over the Destruction of Historical Monuments in Mashhad]', *IRNA*, 21 November 2018, <https://irna.ir/xjrqFL>; Mostafa Sareminia, 'Takhrib-e Baft-e Tarikh-Ye Mashhad Taaroz Bar Hoviyat-e Eslami va Farhang Irani Ast [The Destruction of the Historic Fabric of Mashhad Is an Attack on Islamic Identity and Iranian Culture]', 25 June 2022, isna.ir/xdLTmh.

331 'Belataklifi Bala-Ye Jan-e Baft-e Tarikhi-Ye Shargh-e Meidan-e Naghsh-e Jahan-e Esfahan [Indecision, the Bane of the Historic District East of Naqsh Jahan Square in Isfahan]', *IRNA*, 31 May 2022, [https://irna.ir/xj\)zhj](https://irna.ir/xj)zhj).

in Shiraz made the city the first piece of the demolition domino that hit cities like Isfahan, Ghazvin, Kerman, and Kashan.³³²

In Shiraz, where the historic centre was heavily influenced by paras-tatal religious institutions, the local authorities refused to comply with the MRUD's official 2015 order to revise shrine development plans for protecting listed buildings. Although the heritage authorities won the dispute before the National Security Council in 2019 over the demolition of ten registered houses in Shiraz, the project was not halted. In 2021, after President Raisi's first visit to Shiraz, the project was relaunched with the united support of all stakeholders including some heritage authorities.³³³

Student associations and more than 150 university professors wrote letters to the President and the Minister of Cultural Heritage to stop or restrict the shrine development project. Some argued that the Awqaf-supported project, which included a hotel, shopping centre, and meeting hall for the city council in the historic centre, exceeded the definition of development of worship spaces.³³⁴ There was also extensive debate on social media and in mainstream newspapers about the fact that the transformation of large religious courtyards and historic cemeteries had become a profit-making endeavour for the Awqaf through selling lux-

332 M. Mehdi Kalantari, 'Domino-Ye Takhrib-e Baft-Ha-Ye Tarikhi [Domino Destruction of Historic Cities]', *Shargh Newspaper*, 13 March 2022, 4242 edition, magiran.com/n4279124.

333 See the Twitter posts of Mehdi Hajati, former member of Shiraz City Council (Mar 14, 2018, 11:04 AM) Also: Gholamhossein Memarian et al., 'Online Roundtable: Loder-Ha Be Ziafat-e Baft-e Tarikhi-e Shiraz Miravand? [Will the Loaders Head to the Historic City of Shiraz?]', *Fars News Agency*, 20 January 2022, <https://www.aparat.com/v/JL3rQ>.

334 M. Mehdi Kalantari and Mandana Khoramshaghghi, 'Chalesh-Ha-Ye Hefazat va Tose'e Dar Baft-e Tarikhi-Ye Shiraz [Challenges of Conservation and Development in Shiraz's Historic Fabric]' (Online: Shahid Beheshti University, 24 February 2022), Fieldnotes; 'Public Discussion: Tajrobe-Ye Mashhad; Ebrat-e Shiraz, Be Name Ziyarat, Dar Barabar-e Tarikh [Mashhad's Experience; Lesson for Shiraz, In the Name of Pilgrimage, Against History]'.

ury graves near shrines in Shiraz and other cities.³³⁵ Despite widespread public criticism, President Raisi emphasized the need to address development obstacles caused by cultural heritage preservation “in order to improve the living conditions of the general public”.³³⁶

In this turbulent environment, marked by a tilt toward disorder, even those who typically preferred a restrained approach when criticizing the government started to openly express their concerns. For instance, Hodjat, the director of ICOMOS-Iran and one of the key architects of the post-Revolutionary heritage laws and administrative system, ultimately admitted that these laws could be disregarded in Iran.³³⁷

In 2023, the MCHHT registered the historic Shiraz in the National Heritage list as a reaction to the shrine development project and the public critique surrounding it. This response of heritage bureaucracy to the demolitions in Shiraz closely paralleled its action in 2006 regarding the case of the Oudlajan neighbourhood in Tehran, which also faced extensive demolition.³³⁸ It is worth noting that ever since the Oudlajan neighbourhood was designated as a national heritage site, it has remained an abandoned area of ruins in the midst of a living neighbourhood. This is primarily because of prolonged disputes among various stakeholders, including the municipality, governmental and

335 ISNA, ‘Ghabr-Ha-Ye Miliyardi Dar Shahecheragh! [Billion-Tuman Graves in Shahecheragh!]', 27 October 2014, isna.ir/x8sx4k; ‘Kaseban-e Akherat [The Merchants of the Afterlife]', *Hamshahrionline*, 10 March 2020, hamshahrionline.ir/x6PW; *Roundtable: Be Bahaneh-Ye Tose'e-Ye Haram City Center Misazand/ Az Tamallok-e 8 Milliun Tomani Ta Forush-e Maghab-e 1 Miliard Tomani [Construction of a City Center Under the Pretext of Shrine Development/Land Acquisition for 8 Million Tomans per Square Meter and Its Sale for 1 Billion Tomans as Graves.]* (Tehran: Ensafnews, 2022), <http://www.ensafnews.com/366407/>.

336 ‘Tazahom-Ha-Ye Miras-e Farhangi Ra Hal Konid Ta Mardom Nafas Bekeshand [Address Heritage-Related Disturbances so That People Can Breathe a Sigh of Relief]', *Official Website of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 14 July 2022, <https://www.president.ir/fa/138393>.

337 Mehdi Hodjat, ‘Goftari Dar Bab-e Miras-e Farhangi [A Speech about Cultural Heritage]’ (Iran University of Science and Technology, Tehran, 5 July 2023), <https://www.aparat.com/v/NjTgD>.

338 See Part Two, Urban renewal, the case of Oudlajan.

parastatal entities, and heritage authorities, which have hindered the formulation of a long-term plan for the preservation of the place that is now considered a national heritage site. Given the resemblance in the composition of these stakeholders—both those seeking to territorialize the area under heritage regulations and those aiming to de-territorialize the area from these rules to advance economic objectives—it is plausible that the fate of Shiraz's historical area might follow a trajectory similar to that of the Oudlajan case.

Figure 28: A cartoon of Zarghami, the Minister of Cultural Heritage submitting his approval to General Ghalibaf, the Chairman of the Parliament, for the demolition of historic neighbourhoods, starting with Shiraz and moving on to other cities³³⁹



© Shargh Newspaper, 2022

339 Ibid.

In addition, the implementation of the Productivization Law, despite disagreement from the academic and professional community, provided the public sphere with a glimpse into what would become the standard practice in the years ahead. The crucial element that rendered the Productivization Law arbitrary was the fact that those tasked with enforcing the law were granted judicial immunity for their actions under the framework of the legislation. In November 2022, the Supreme Leader gave his approval for the implementation of the aforementioned law, which allowed the state to acquire and liquidate underutilized properties of ministries, state organizations, and state-owned companies such as the Revitalization and Utilization Fund for Historic Sites and the Urban Regeneration Company.³⁴⁰ The Productivization Law was intended to ensure that underused public properties were sold to the private sector.

The Productivization Law enabled the transfer of ownership of several historic buildings owned by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and other state organizations to the private sector in a highly non-transparent process. Interestingly, properties under the ownership of parastatal organizations, such as the Awqaf, remained untouched by the Productivization Law. Here, it is also worth recalling the history of privatization in Iran, which allowed parastatal organizations to become dominant players in the private sector particularly after Ahmadinejad's administration.

340 Supreme Council of Chiefs of State and Government for Economic Coordination, 'Mosavabeh-Ye Movaledsazi-Ye Darayi-Ha-Ye Dolat [The Act on the Productivization of State Assets]' (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance, 24 November 2020).

*Figure 29: The Shahecheragh project in Shiraz*³⁴¹

© ISNA, 2022

Moreover, the Productivization Law suspended all conflicting legislation for a period of two years, which allowed legal and private persons involved in the decision-making and implementation of the processes to be exempt from public investigation.³⁴² Although a large portion of the capital generated would be returned to state organizations, the processes were extremely opaque due to the legal immunity of the executors. Hence, these procedures could, for instance, suspend the 1987 Law on Irreplaceable Treasures that makes the sale of nationally significant cultural properties subject to parliamentary approval.³⁴³ While the 1987 law on *nafayes* was frequently breached in the past, public discussions and legal actions against such violations were not explicitly prohibited before. After the implementation of the Productivization Law, experts could only stand by and witness the acts of impunity in the two-year period.

341 Somayyeh Hasanlu, 'Pardebardari Az Yak Ettefagh Dar Baft-e Shiraz [Uncovering an Event in the Historic Shiraz]', *ISNA*, 14 June 2022, isna.ir/xdLQ8W.

342 *Ibid.*, para. 5.

343 Parliament of Iran, 'Chanoon-e Mohasebat-e Omumi-e Keshvar [The Public Audit Act]'.

Urban heritage in academic discourse and the public sphere: A journey from the 2010s to 2022

For decades, both academic and non-academic government entities sought to codify urban planning for historic cities. This involved the deliberations concerning a potential nationwide framework that would act as a basis for drafting legally binding guidelines tailored to historic cities. After the Fifth National Development Plan (2011–2015),³⁴⁴ the MRUD and the ICHHTO, along with the latter's university partners, conducted a baseline study to develop guidelines for planning historic cities. Part of this study was published in a book that examined the administrative and legal background of preservation in Iranian cities and advocated for a national charter that took into account the cultural, social, economic, and administrative aspects of urban conservation.³⁴⁵ The authors suggested that a national charter, if accepted by all experts involved, could be a basis for drafting legally binding guidelines for historic cities.

About a decade before the aforementioned publication, Falamaki had already been commissioned by the MRUD to develop a national charter for conservation in the urban context.³⁴⁶ Yet, despite the extensive scholarly work done to translate international concepts, an agreement was not reached concerning terms such as 'urban conservation', 'restoration', 'rehabilitation', 'regeneration', or 'authenticity' and 'integrity'.³⁴⁷ The lack of a common language and the disciplinary divide between the experts was also evident at academic or political events I

344 Parliament of Iran, 'Ghanun-e Barnamey-e Panjom-e Tose-Ey-e Eghtesadi, Ejtemai va Farhangi-e Jomhuriy-e Eslami-e Iran [The Law of the Fifth Plan of Economic, Social and Cultural Development of Islamic Republic of Iran]'.

345 Mohammadmoradi, Amirkabirian, and Abdi Ardakani, *Revitalisation of Historic Urban Fabrics (a Review of Experiences)*.

346 M. Mansour Falamaki, *Nazariyehi Bar Manshur-e Maremmat-e Shahri [An Essay on Urban Restoration Charter]* (Tehran: MRUD, 2008).

347 Fieldnotes of the panel discussions (one and two) of officials and academics such as M. Talebian, P. Hanachi, S. M. Beheshti Shirazi, A. Mohammadmoradi, Z. Nikzad, A. Gholinejad Pirbazari, and others at the First National Symposium on Conservation and Management of Urban Heritage, organized by the Research

attended. These events tend to represent the standpoint of one disciplinary group. When different fields come together, urban planners are likely to accuse conservationists of reducing complex urban areas to a group of historic buildings, while conservationists accuse planners of neglecting cultural and historical significance.³⁴⁸

Although common ground is critical for urban heritage planning, a national charter would only be beneficial if it can be enforced. And, this would only be possible in a system that respected the rule of law. Of the 29 conservation experts I interviewed, many believe that theoretical concepts endorsed in legal documents and official project reports are often disregarded in practice due to economic constraints and corrupt bureaucratic processes. Thus, although legally binding cultural heritage and urban planning documents are undoubtedly a crucial step towards the territorialization of urban conservation in Iran, they have failed to carry sufficient weight in many of the struggles discussed.

This fact may not be straightforwardly discussed in scholarly publications, but in less formal settings, namely at public events, in newsletters, and on social media, the academic and professional community have shown that they are aware of the underlying problem. The frequent changes in governmental policy due to the constant struggle between political factions, the private or institutional mishandling of urban resources, and the lack of will for conservation throughout the governmental system were among the issues that—while not reflected in scholarly publications—were frequently discussed during my fieldwork.³⁴⁹

Center of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, Tehran, February 12–13, 2022.

348 For instance: The expert meeting on experiences of writing guidelines for historic fabrics, organized by Tehran Municipality, Mehraban Historic House, Tehran, 27.1.2020; The First National Symposium on Conservation and Management of Urban Heritage, organized by the Research Center of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, Tehran, February 12–13, 2022;

349 Fieldnotes at: the First National Symposium on Conservation and Management of Urban Heritage, organized by the Research Center of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, Tehran, February 12–13, 2022; Online Seminar on The Ro-

As mentioned, in Iran, public opinion on conservation and urban heritage planning has been historically led by architects, conservationists, and planners. In recent years, criticism in the public sphere has gone beyond complaints about the destruction of historic places and has been directed against systematic corruption and mismanagement. Given that such criticism comes at a price, I have noticed a spectrum of directness in the commentary. At the more conservative end, there are lectures and interviews of former government officials who are now academics and NGO directors, and at the other—more outspoken—end, public outcry on social media.

Some, like Mehdi Hodjat, the head of ICOMOS-Iran, who believes that a conservative “Revolutionary spirit”³⁵⁰ would work better in Iran, have preferred the carefully worded and secretive 1980s-style critique behind closed doors.³⁵¹ Considering the politicized nature of NGOs in Iran, similar bodies have also preferred to work behind the scenes. The act of regarding public criticism as unnecessary and preferring hushed resolutions within organizations is consistent with Herzfeld’s notion of cultural intimacy.³⁵² When I asked a member of Docomomo-Iran³⁵³ about the reason for the institute’s conservative public stance, he replied that NGOs in Iran are usually headed by influential officials, which gives them prestige on the one hand and makes them vulnerable on the

le of International Organizations in Conservation of Cultural Heritage with Emphasis on Architectural and Urban Heritage, 18 April, 2021, organized by NGO of Conservators; Seminar on Contemporary Architecture and Question of Intangible Cultural Heritage, 30 May 2021, organized by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Centre-Tehran, Ministry of Cultural Heritage.

350 ‘In Conversation with Mehdi Hodjat (TV Show)’, *Dastkhat* (Tehran: IRIB-Channel 5, 5 July 2021).

351 ‘ICOMOS-Iran Meeting, Field Notes: Tehran va Darvazehayash Be Ravayat-e Asnad-e Tasviri Tarikhi [Tehran and Its Gates According to Historical Pictorial Evidence].’ (Tehran, 21 May 2022).

352 Herzfeld, ‘The European Crisis and Cultural Intimacy’.

353 The International Committee for Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement.

other.³⁵⁴ Taking a bold position could even lead to the suspension of such organizations.

Between the two extremes of the mentioned spectrum, some actors who are not part of the government have preferred to join pro-reform administrative and academic assemblage in the hopes of making a difference. They have led campaigns in Tehran, for example, to regain access to the Urban Dialogue House or to enforce restrictions on density selling in the historic districts, or to pedestrianize historic streets.

A few academics have openly spoken of the “systematic looting”, practiced by “hubristic authorities”.³⁵⁵ Or they have called for “the punishment of the greedy”, arguing that “this is not a conservation issue, but an issue of injustice” against rentier-based foundations.³⁵⁶ To avoid being labelled Islamophobic, such activists have sought the support of the clergy or found theological justifications for their arguments in favour of conservation. For example, one conservation architect sought the support of a clergyman to align the theological understanding of social welfare with Lefebvre’s concept of the “right to the city”³⁵⁷ to argue against the shrine development project in Shiraz.³⁵⁸

354 Interview on 17 July 2021 via Skype.

355 Roundtable: *Be Bahaneh-Ye Tose'e-Ye Haram City Center Misazand/ Az Tamallok-e 8 Milliun Tomani Ta Forush-e Maghaber-e 1 Miliard Tomani* [Construction of a City Center Under the Pretext of Shrine Development/Land Acquisition for 8 Million Tomans per Square Meter and Its Sale for 1 Billion Tomans as Graves.].

356 ‘Public Discussion: Esfahan-e Faryad, Ba Mozuiyat-e Ehdas-e Mehvar-e Aghanoorollah Najafi [on the CConstruction of Aghanoorollah-e Najafi Street]’ (Isfahan: Ivan Cultural Group, 8 December 2019), Fieldnotes.

357 See for example: Mark Purcell, ‘Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant’, *GeoJournal* 58, no. 2 (2002): 99–108.

358 Ali Hojjatoleslam Elahi Khorasani and M. Mehdi Kalantari, ‘Instagram Live Field Notes: Takhrib-e Baft-e Shiraz va Tose'e-Ye Haram-e Shahecheragh Az Manzar-e Fegh-e Eslami [Demolition of the Historical Urban Fabric of Shiraz and Development of the Shahecheragh Shrine From an Islamic Theological Perspective].’ (Student Association for Architecture, Conservation and Planning., 3 August 2022).

Figure 30: ICOMOS-Iran public meeting on tourism



Author, 2022

Figure 31: Public meeting organized by Ivan Cultural Group in Isfahan



© Ivan, 2019

Observing the interaction of the general public with urban heritage

The attitude of the general public toward urban heritage policies is, above all, reflected in the number of court cases against heritage authorities.³⁵⁹ Nevertheless, as Falamaki once said, the livelihood of people in historic cities, like everyone else's, depends on the economic fluctuations of the property market.³⁶⁰ Indeed, the public are neither inherently vandals nor lovers of historic buildings. My field research in Tehran³⁶¹ and in the Tabriz Bazaar³⁶² confirms that people tend to be sympathetic to conservation, especially when it does not come at a high cost to them. This sympathy may have various psychological and social motives.³⁶³ Or, as David Lowenthal said, "people tend to yearn for the past out of frustration with their present".³⁶⁴ Similarly, sociologist Mohammad Fazeli argued that Iranian society's nostalgia for the past is a result of frustration due to being overburdened by accumulated unresolved socioeconomic and cultural problems.³⁶⁵

Following the inclusion of the Trans-Iranian Railway on the World Heritage List, Instagram users argued that the project was not an

359 Judiciary Research Institute-Iran, *Malekiyat-e Khosusi Ya Manfaat-e Omumi?: Naghd-e Raviye Shoabe Divane Edalat-e Edari Piramun-e Ebtal-e Tasmim-e Sazman-e Miras-e Farhangi va Tarikhi Dar Fehrest-e Athar-e Melli* [Private Property or Public Interest? A Critique of the Administrative Court Branches' Procedure Regarding the Annulment of the Cultural Heritage Organization's Decision in the Listing of National Monuments].

360 Falamaki, 'Ayandeh-Ye Baft-Ha-Ye Shahri-Ye Tarikhi-Ye Iran: Padideh-Ha va Badil-Ha [The Future of Urban Historic Fabrics in Iran: Phenomena and Alternatives]'.

361 See Part Two.

362 Yadollahi, 'The Iranian Bazaar as a Public Place: A Reintegrative Approach and a Method Applied towards the Case Study of the Tabriz Bazaar'.

363 Jeremy C Wells, 'The Affect of Old Places: Exploring the Dimensions of Place Attachment and Senescent Environments', in *Place Meaning and Attachment* (Routledge, 2020), 1–15.

364 David Lowenthal, 'The Heritage Crusade and Its Contradictions', *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, 2004, 19–43.

365 Fazeli, *Iran Bar Labe-Ye Tigh, Coftar-Ha-Ye Jameshenasi-Ye Siyasi va Siyasat-e Omumi* [Iran, on the Edge of the Blade Essays on Political Sociology and Public Policy].

achievement of the Islamic Republic, but of the Pahlavi era, with social media comments like “Reza Shah, God bless your soul” and pictures showing the Shah supervising the railroad project or opening stations.

Figure 32: A frequently shared photograph of Reza Shah, which gained significant traction on social media after the Trans-Iranian Railway was added to the World Heritage List. The image captures Reza Shah and his son, the Crown Prince, framed within a train window in 1932.³⁶⁶



The cannon firing ceremony near Azadi Tower (Shahyad) on Nowruz 1400 (21 March 2021) evoked a similar reaction from the public. The ceremony was organized by the Municipality of Tehran and the military. Beheshti Shirazi, the former Director of the ICHO and former advisor to the municipality, had co-authored a book on the tradition of cannon firing associated with the Pearl Cannon in late Qajar Tehran as a symbol of

366 ‘Be Bahaneh-Ye 81 Salegi-Ye Rah-e Ahan [On the Occasion of the 81st Anniversary of the National Railroads]’, *Tinnnews*, 26 August 2019, <https://www.tinn.ir/fa/tiny/news-195131>.

hope for progress and victory.³⁶⁷ By suggesting that Iranians were on the way to solving their problems, he and his co-authors linked the symbolism of the Pearl Cannon to the hope of a successful nuclear agreement by the reformist government.³⁶⁸ Although Beheshti's role (if any) in the 2021 ceremony remains unclear, his approach to the tradition of cannon firing provides a perspective on the event organized by the (then) pro-reform municipality. On Instagram, Javadi Yeganeh, an official at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, posted a video of the ceremony, saying that the municipality and the army wanted to revive a forgotten historical tradition of Tehran.³⁶⁹

Meanwhile, on Instagram and Twitter, there was a range of reactions to the news. Some sympathized with reviving a Qajar tradition, posting pictures of women wearing Qajar-style chadors, and writing, "I feel like this is the year 1299 Hijri".³⁷⁰ Concerned that the cannon would damage the Azadi Tower, some wrote in mainstream newspapers that it would be appropriate to fire a cannon not in Azadi but in a Qajar square in Tehran where cannon firing was practiced in the past.³⁷¹ Some said that the organizers would not mind destroying the Pahlavi heritage (the Shahyad or Azadi tower). And several users took advantage of the online publicity surrounding the subject to express their anger at the incompetence and mismanagement of the IRGC, which had caused a disaster a year earlier. Recalling the downing of Flight 752, which killed all 176 passengers on 8 January 2020,³⁷² they addressed the organizers: "Be careful, the cannons

367 Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti Shirazi, Elnaz Najjar Najafi, and Behnam Abutorabian, *Sheikh-e Bahai va Toop-e Morvarid [Sheikh Baha'i and the Pearl Cannon]* (Tehran: Rozaneh, n.d.).

368 Ibid.

369 https://www.instagram.com/tv/CMpeXhspfCx/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link (accessed on March 22, 2021)

370 In the Islamic lunar calendar, 1881.

371 Fatemeh Karimi, 'Tarak-Ha-Ye Jadid Tasir-e Shelik-e Toop Tahvil-e Sal Ru-Ye Borj-e Azadi? [New Cracks, the Impact of Cannon Fire on the Azadi Tower?]', *Mehr News Agency*, 28 March 2021, mehrnews.com/xV27b.

372 For details see: Jeff Yaworski, 'The Downing of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752: Factual Analysis' (Global Affairs Canada, 24 January 2021), <https://www>

could accidentally be war cannons”, or “Be careful that you don’t accidentally shoot down a plane”, or “What if (another) ‘human error’ happens”, or “If the IRGC is going to shoot, people in the Azadi neighbourhood should be careful, what can you do if they say the gunman made a mistake?”.

In a country like Iran, where almost every aspect of citizens’ daily lives is militarized and politicized, people tend to take any news, including news about heritage, as an occasion for political confrontation. Instagram users’ conversations with Mehdi Hajati, a former member of Shiraz City Council who campaigned against the shrine construction project in 2018, shows that people tend to place heritage concerns within a larger political framework. For instance, in response to Hajati’s call to resume the campaign against the project in 2022, one user posted:

I don’t think our problem nowadays is limited to the demolition of the historic city. . . everything has become a confrontation of the nation with the state, a confrontation over the hijab, social freedom and citizenship, economic inflation, poverty, and mismanagement of the natural environment; This has become a battlefield and we should not give up fighting.³⁷³

Following the 2022 ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ uprising and in the face of increasing public discontent expressed on social media, the Islamic Parliament proposed criminalizing public criticism against the state.³⁷⁴ Furthermore, the purge process that began in state organizations and universities brought to mind the atmosphere that prevailed after the 1979 Revolution and following the arrival of the hardline government in 2005.

www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/flight-vol-ps752/factual_analysis-analyse_faits.aspx?lang=eng.

373 https://www.instagram.com/p/CaFDFSogTty/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link (accessed 11 March 2022)

374 See: Mohammad Najmi, ‘Moraghebe Ezhar-e Nazar-Hayetan Bashid [Watch Your Mouth]’, *Etemad Newspaper*, 26 January 2023, <https://www.etemadonline.com/tiny/news-593602>.

