

Introduction

During the initial phase of my research, I engaged in an interview with Mohammad Mansour Falamaki, an eminent figure among the early generation of Iranian urban and architectural conservationists whose impact on the field dates back to the early 1970s. When I inquired about the evolution of the field of conservation in Iran, Falamaki characterized it as an overwhelming story, one that would shock any reasonable person. Through my comprehensive examination of the legal, administrative, and social trajectories of the field in Iranian cities, I have discerned a recurring tendency whereby accumulated resources and structures are deliberately dumped, only to be rebuilt in subsequent cycles. Speaking of shocking, Falamaki was, in a way, alluding to this tendency.

I started my investigation without any preconceived assumptions about heritage planning in Iran and relied solely on empirical observations to interpret my findings. Nevertheless, the deeper I delved into my investigation, the stronger my conviction became that the evolution of urban heritage planning in Iran exemplifies the thesis put forth by the historian Homa Katouzian about Iranian society. In the broader domain of Iranian socio-political history, Katouzian has identified a similar pattern: Iran is a “short-term society” resembling a “pick-axe”, in other words, a near-crumbling building subjected to constant teardowns and reconstructions based on the transient desires of its rulers.¹ Katouzian

1 Homa Katouzian, ‘The Short-Term Society: A Study in the Problems of Long-Term Political and Economic Development in Iran’, *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 1 (2004): 2.

asserts that the arbitrariness of the states and societies in Iran has created a history consisting of "a series of short runs", interrupted by successive waves of groups in political and economic power. In other words, it is a pick-axe society undergoing a recurring cycle of revolutionary detachment from established structures, re-establishment of new structures, and detachment once again. Every governing authority endeavours to dismantle the prevailing system and institute a fresh one, yet paradoxically, this very process perpetuates the cycle.

The historical trajectory of conservation and urban heritage planning in Iran throughout the past six decades is characterized by a series of fragmented aspirations, transient accomplishments, and iterative fresh beginnings. This pattern endures, whether instigated by revolutionary upheavals, transformative shifts in governmental power, or reconfigurations in city administrations.

The academic scope of the book

Conservation research has brought attention to the intricate link between conservation and urban development, elucidating how national policies pertaining to urban development have influenced the politics surrounding conservation.² The field of conservation has been urged to reconsider its methodologies and strategies in order to strengthen its role and flexibility in response to contemporary urban problems.³ Given

2 Gregory J Ashworth and John E Tunbridge, 'Old Cities, New Pasts: Heritage Planning in Selected Cities of Central Europe', *GeoJournal*, 1999, 105–16; Gregory John Ashworth, 'Conservation as Preservation or as Heritage: Two Paradigms and Two Answers', *Built Environment (1978-)* 23, no. 2 (1997): 92–102; Max Page and Randall Mason, *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (Routledge, 2004); John Pendlebury, *Conservation in the Age of Consensus* (London: Routledge, 2008).

3 Ashworth, 'Conservation as Preservation or as Heritage: Two Paradigms and Two Answers'; Hans-Rudolf Meier, *Denkmale in Der Stadt--Die Stadt Als Denkmal: Probleme Und Chancen Für Den Stadtumbau* (Dresden: TUD press, 2006); Pendlebury, *Conservation in the Age of Consensus*; Francesco Bandarin and Ron van Oers,