

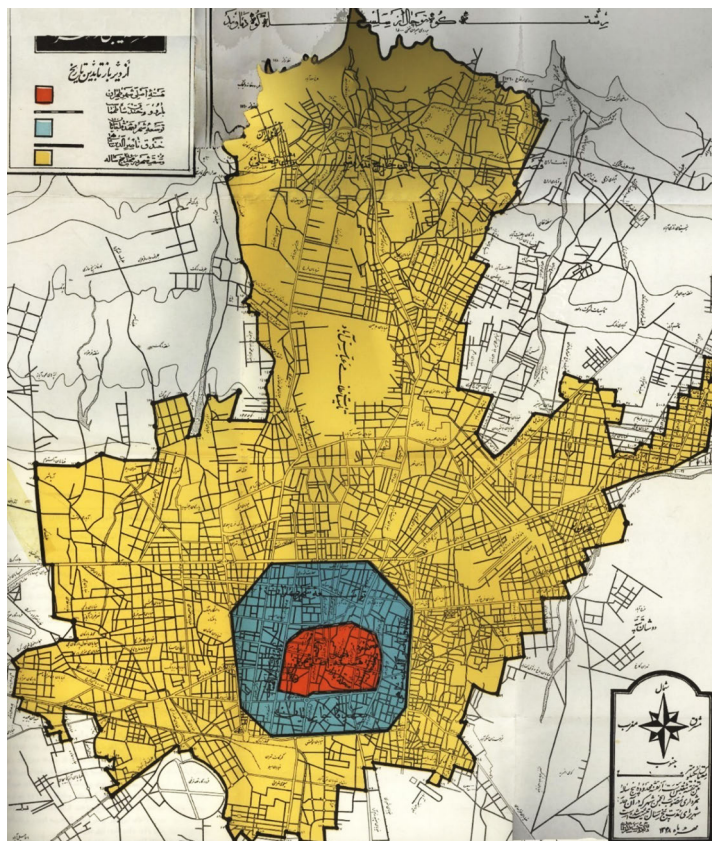
Assembling urban heritage in Tehran: Collecting heritage fragments here and there

An introduction to Tehran's historic centre and its spatial-economic setting

Historical and natural sites of touristic and cultural value located within the metropolitan area of Tehran all play a role in the city's socio-spatial urban heritage planning.¹ In this book, I mainly focus on the city centre because of the high density of listed areas² and its complex spatial-economic setting that makes it a convenient case for analyzing urban heritage policy and practice in an Iranian metropolis. In addition, this area is home to nationally significant sites that are tied to Iran's political history, notably following the Constitutional Revolution. The approximately 2250-hectare area, located in the current municipal Districts 11 and 12, is identified by policy documents as the historical centre of Tehran, covering the city's development trajectories of the 16th-century Safavid and the 19th-century Qajar periods (Figure 33).

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- 1 According to Tehran's 2007 Master Plan. See: Institute for Research and Preparation of Urban Development Plans of Tehran, 'Tarh-e Rahbordi-Sakhtari-Ye To-se va Omran-e Shahr-e Tehran (Tarh-e Jame Tehran 1386) [Strategic-Structural Plan for the Development of the City of Tehran (Master Plan 2007)]' (MRUD, 2007).
 - 2 In addition to individual monuments, large areas such as the bazaar complex (listed since 1977), the Oudlajan Quarter (listed since 2006) and the Arg Quarter (listed since 2007) are protected by national heritage laws.

Figure 33: The location of the Safavid (red) and Qajar (blue) boundaries in the 1967 development plan of Tehran (yellow)³



- 3 Reza Shirazian, *Tehran Negari; Bank-e Naghsheh-Ha va Anavin-e Makani-e Tehran-e Ghadim* [Documentation of Tehran; Database of Maps and Place Names of the Old Tehran] (Tehran: Dastan, 2017), 512.

Tehran's first Master Plan⁴ and the debates among experts in the early reflect the concerns planners had as early as the 1960s about the future of housing and preservation in the historic city centre.⁵ The underregulated and construction-driven post-Revolutionary policies in Tehran had not been able to overcome the city's long-standing issues.⁶ Similarly, neither the pre-Revolutionary modernization projects, nor the Islamic Revolutionary promises for social justice and reform could address the unresolved historical problems of the city centre.⁷ In an effort to avoid immediate political and economic risks associated with making concrete decisions for the area, policymakers in Tehran have tended to prevaricate on the issues until they have to be dealt with by future administrations.⁸

The literature on these issues inevitably lands on the dominant actor of the city centre, the Grand Bazaar. As early as the 1970s, scholars warned that the shopping malls mushrooming around the bazaar and the underground railway planned at the time would only aggravate the area's infrastructural precarity.⁹ Yet, the decaying and overburdened

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- 4 Abdolaziz Farmanfarmaian and Victor Groen Institute, 'Master Plan of Tehran' (Sazman-e Barnameh va Budgeh, 1968).
 - 5 For instance see the proceedings of the Second Symposium of Iranian Architecture-Tehran, 1973: Art and Architecture, *Art and Architecture*, 3–65.
 - 6 Ali Madanipour, 'Urban Planning and Development in Tehran', *Urbanization and the Iranian Revolution* 23, no. 6 (1 December 2006): 433–38, doi:10.1016/j.cities.2006.08.002.
 - 7 Ali Madanipour, *Tehran: The Making of a Metropolis*, World Cities Series (Chichester: John Wiley, 1998); Kian Tajbakhsh, 'The Political Economy of Fiscal Decentralization under the Islamic Republic of Iran', *The Muslim World* 111, no. 1 (2021): 113–37.
 - 8 See, for example, the report prepared by an interdisciplinary team of faculty members at the University of Tehran: Mohammadali Kamrava et al., *Barresi-Ye Tarh-Ha-Ye Nosazi-Ye Baft-e Farsoodeh-Ye Tehran Da Panjah Sal-e Gozashteh [An Overview Of Renovation Projects In Tehran's Decaying Urban Fabric Over The Past Fifty Years]* (Tehran: University of Tehran, Department of Applied Research, 2011).
 - 9 Kazem Vadie, 'Bazaar Dar Baft-e Novin-e Shahri [Bazaar in the Modern Urban Fabric]', in *Avalin Seminar-e Maremat-e Banaha va Sharhay-e Tarikhi: Vojud va Ayan-deye Marakez-e Maskuni-e Tarikhi* [The First Seminar on the Conservation of Historic

bazaar in the heart of the city centre continued to expand to take more warehouse and workshop space from its surrounding neighbourhoods. Pointing to the lack of maintenance of the city centre infrastructure (sewage system, electricity, gas, etc.), experts warned that the bazaar and its surroundings had become a time bomb, particularly given the likelihood of the next sizeable earthquake.¹⁰

Following a fire in the Grand Bazaar in February 2022, former municipal officials, planners, sociologists, and guild representatives discussed how risk preparedness in the bazaar relies on complex spatial politics involving local and national government and para-governmental agencies (*bonyads*), the Awqaf Organization, and the guilds who own a significant share of the religious and commercial units in the bazaar and the city centre.¹¹

The historically established influence of the bazaar on national politics,¹² and particularly in the capital,¹³ tends to make municipal authorities indulgent when it comes to negotiating space and mobility with those who work in and around it. The spatial politics in the Tehran Bazaar cannot be equated with those of other historical bazaars such as the Tabriz Bazaar, mainly because of the former's political importance. Perhaps this is the reason why the pre- and post-Revolutionary conservation plans for Tehran Bazaar have never materialized,¹⁴ although

Cities and Towns: The Existence and Future of Historical Residential Centres], ed. M. Mansour Falamaki (Tehran: University of Tehran, 1971), 89–93.

- 10 Japan International Cooperation Agency and Tehran Disaster Mitigation and Management Center, 'The Comprehensive Master Plan Study on Urban Seismic Disaster Prevention and Management for the Greater Tehran Area', JICA, 2005.
- 11 Sociologist, Mohammad Fazeli, guild representative of Tehran Bazaar, Abdollah Esfandiyar, former Mayor of Municipal District 12, Alimohammad Saadati, and others were among the speakers at the Clubhouse room for 'Marg Ya Zendegi-e Bazaar-e Tehran' [The Death or Life of the Tehran Bazaar] on 17 February 2022.
- 12 On the historical background of the bazaar's political alliances in Iran, see: Ashraf, 'Bazaar-Mosque Alliance: The Social Basis of Revolts and Revolutions'.
- 13 Arang Keshavarzian, *Bazaar and State in Iran: The Politics of the Tehran Marketplace*, vol. 26 (Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- 14 For instance, the plan proposed by: Ayatollah Zadeh Shirazi et al., 'Samandehi-e Bazaar-e Tehran [The Improvement of the Tehran Bazaar]'.

several state-funded research projects have investigated socio-spatial issues in the area.¹⁵

My experience walking through Baharestan, Sangeladge, and Oud-lajan, areas adjacent to the bazaar, was quite similar. The fenced walls and covered entrances with half-destroyed historic brickwork and covered windows indicate neglected or abandoned houses, warehouses or workshops, some of which were illegal according to local residents. Flyers on the walls also describe common functions for these buildings: “Beginner and professional stickers and shoemakers sought”, “Full-time employee with a motorbike wanted”, “Skilled workers wanted for wax carving and welding”, or “This property (a caravanserai) is for sale”. Abandoned usually due to unresolved legal issues, these structures also served as shelters for the homeless, indicated by the scorch marks along the walls. Some buildings, made of materials you could easily knock a hole through, were still inhabited by groups of homeless people. In heavy rain, the softened mud brick structures made it even easier to enter the houses. During the COVID-19 crisis, illegal occupation increased due to the lockdowns, which led to a decrease in on-site monitoring. The frequency of the signs described gradually decreased the further away one walked from the bazaar, and so did the car traffic and the density of motorbikes parked on pedestrian paths (See Figure 34).

15 Some of the comprehensive examples of such research projects are: Piran, Az *Shoma Harekat Az Khoda Barekat, Tose'e-Ye Mosharekat Mabna va Mosharekat Meh-var Dar Iran: Mored-e Tehran [God Helps Those Who Help Themselves: Participatory Local Development in Iran: The Case of Tehran]*; Kamrava et al., *Barresi-Ye Tarh-Ha-Ye Nosazi-Ye Baft-e Farsoodeh-Ye Tehran Da Panjah Sal-e Gozashteh [An Overview Of Renovation Projects In Tehran's Decaying Urban Fabric Over The Past Fifty Years]*; Hajaliakbari and Shafie, *Tose-Ye Mahalli: Chaharchoobi Bara-Ye Mahalleh-Ha-Ye Nakaramad [Neighborhood Development: A Framework for Dysfunctional Neighborhoods]*.

Figure 34: The spatial-economic setting of the historic centre of Tehran¹⁶



- 16 The map is constructed upon foundational Google Earth imagery (© 2023 Airbus and © 2023 Maxar Technologies) and represents a broad qualitative assessment by the author, intended to elucidate concepts within this book. The evaluation draws from the subsequent sources: Paramadan Engineers Municipality of Tehran, 'Bayaniyeh va sanad-e rahbord-e modiriyat va hefazat-e baft va banahay-e tarikhi-farhangi-e Tehran [Declaration and strategic document of the management and conservation of the historic-cultural fabric of Tehran]' (Paramadan Engineers, 2014); Bavand Consulting Engineers, 'The Detailed Plan of Tehran's 12th District' (Tehran: Tehran Urban Research and Planning Centre, 2006), Tehran Urban Research and Planning Centre; Institute for Research and Preparation of Urban Development Plans of Tehran, 'Tarh-e Rahbord-e Sakhtari-ye Tose va Ofran-e Shahr-e Tehran (Tarh-e Jame Tehran 1386) [Strategic-Structural Plan for the Development of the City of Tehran (Master Plan 2007)]'.

Figure 35: The fading remains of a once stately entrance to a historic house in Oudlajan, now under the pressure of the bustling bazaar



Author, 2021