Short stories around renewal, beautification, and place-making in Tehran's historic centre

Urban renewal

Post-Revolutionary urban renewal policy and practice in Tehran continued the course of the 1960s urban modernization projects.[17] Navab was the first large-scale urban renewal project undertaken by the municipality under the state's post-war reconstruction policies in the 1990s.[18] The project brought high financial revenues to the municipality—who could no longer rely on state funding following the post-war decentralization policies—and encouraged further redevelopment ambitions in the city centre.[19] In addition to large-scale projects such as Navab, smaller private redevelopment projects in Tehran's decaying areas such as the city centre also proliferated. Private investors with enough redevelopment capital would put together two or more small properties to develop residential units. Those who did not have the capital would have to stay in the decaying buildings or, in case their property fell under a public project, sell their land to the state, usually at a low price.[20] Whatever the case, the municipality became the primary beneficiary by making property investments or selling urban density to private investors. As

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17   See: Madanipour, *Tehran: The Making of a Metropolis.*

18   The project revolved around the construction of a new highway that provided a rapid connection between the central and northern districts of the city. Although the Navab project was not located in the historic zone (near its western borders), it has generally influenced urban regeneration practice in Tehran.

19   Ali Madanipour, 'City Profile: Tehran', *Cities* 16, no. 1 (1999): 57–65.

20   Piran conducted field research on the social and economic consequences of such top-down redevelopment policies. See: 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].*

a result, projects like Navab were widely criticized for being socially unjust.[21]

The Oudlajan neighbourhood in the eastern part of Qajar Tehran in particular became a point of contention regarding municipal redevelopment and heritage ambitions. The neighbourhood saw the initial resurgence of heritage activism against top-down urban renewal projects in the 1970s,[22] and has stood as a crucial focal point for numerous urban conservation plans. The dissertation records of Tehran and Isfahan universities since the 1980s show a relatively consistent scholarly interest in this topic, which is addressed as a problem of urban design, urban renewal, urban landscape, and urban regeneration [*bazafarini-ye shahri*]. Pointing to the depth of Oudlajan's socio-spatial dilemma, the mayor of Tehran's District 12 once said in a public meeting: "If we don't save the residential areas in the city centre now, they will be like Oudlajan in ten years".[23]

When an urban conservation specialist I spoke with in Tehran said that roughly half of the professors she knew had already worked on Oudlajan-related projects, she was not exaggerating the amount of academic work in the area. So, why did these studies and plans all fail? Some have concluded that it is a cultural problem—primarily the public's lack of interest in and sense of belonging to the historic city.[24] To that end, many

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21   Many have argued that it led to substantial changes in the historically evolved social, physical, and functional structure of several neighbourhoods that were affected. See: Madanipour, 'City Profile: Tehran'; 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]*; H Bahrainy and B Aminzadeh, 'Evaluation of Navab Regeneration Project in Central Tehran, Iran', 2007.

22   See an interview with Keyvan Khosravani, an architect who drew attention to the historic value of the neighbourhood in the 1970s: Keyvan Salimi, 'A Stitch to the Earth, Meeting Keyvan Khosravani', *Memar*, no. 113 (2019): 4–9.

23   On June 3, 2021, a live broadcast took place on the public Instagram account of the District 12 Mayor (asaadati.tehran). The livestream was titled 'Ten Weeks in Tehran's Historic Core' [Dah hafte dar ghalb-e tarikhi Tehran].

24   Naimeh Rezaei and Pirooz Hanachi, 'Mahaleh-Ye Oudlajan, Miras-e Shahri Dar Taghabol Bein-e Sonnat va Modernite [The Oudlajan Neighbourhood, Urban

academics have proposed awareness-raising campaigns to change society's attitude toward cultural heritage. Others have proposed participatory strategies to improve social cooperation with urban conservation projects in the neighbourhood.[25]

I engaged in informal discussions, both online and offline, where stakeholders like heritage activists and professionals were more open and transparent in sharing their insights. These settings provided a platform for candid revelations that diverged from the content typically found in official project reports and academic papers.

In conversations about Oudlajan, almost everyone (journalists, community professionals, artists, conservationists, and scholars) spoke of a deadlock between the heritage authorities, the Municipality, and a bonyad.[26] They narrated the same sequence of events, pointing to an economic interplay of key political actors in the city centre. The story starts in the mid-2000s, when the municipality drew homeless people to certain parts of the neighbourhood and proceeded to reduce those areas' municipal sanitation services. Then, a wave of media reports drew attention to the rising rates of crime in the neighbourhood. Consequently, the police and the municipality, in cooperation with a para-governmental organization called Bonyad-e Taavon-e Naja cleared and acquired an area of about two hectares, intending to use the plot for a joint redevelopment project. Before the project took off, heritage authorities placed the entire area under heritage protection in 2006,

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Heritage at the Crossroads of Tradition and Modernity]', *Journal of Iranian Architecture Studies* 4, no. 7 (2015): 19–34.

25   Seyyed Mohsen Habibi and Mehran Foroughifa, 'Finding Some Strategies for Encouraging People to Cooperate in Urban Renovation Plans Based on the Game Theory', *Honar-Ha-Ye-Ziba: Memary Va Shahrsazi* 18, no. 19 (2013): 5–14, doi:10.22059/jfaup.2013.51677.

26   Also reflected in the newspapers. For instance see: Maryam Atyabi, 'Bazarcheh-Ye Oudlajan Dar Khatar Ast//Bonyad-e Tavon-e Naja Baft-e Tarikhi Ra Takhrib Mikonad [Oudlajan Bazaar Is in Danger // Bonyad-e Taavon-e Naja Is Destroying the Historical Fabric]', *Honarnews*, 10 December 2011, https://honarnews.co m/vdcc0sq1.2bq1i8laa2.html; ISNA, 'Amadand, Kharab Kardand, va Raftand … [They Came, Destroyed and Left …]', *ISNA*, 25 June 2016, isna.ir/x9QrCW.

halting the project. However, lacking the economic resources necessary for the preservation of such a large urban area and constrained by decentralization policies, the heritage authorities could do nothing else with the site and abandoned it. The fate of the contested land has been on hold to this day.

I visited a part of the demolished area in Borazjan (a smaller neighbourhood within Oudlajan). The atmosphere was intimidating and poetic at the same time. Mirza Hamid's[27] murals on the remains of the demolished houses and the chimneys and staircases exposed to the open space invoked an artistic and melancholic ambience. But, one couldn't help thinking about the residents of the neighbouring houses.

Figure 36: Aerial photos of Oudlajan in 1956*, 2000, and 2007**

*© Iranian Cartography Organization **Google Earth, © 2021 Maxar Technologies

The recent measures of the municipality to clean up the space and organize public events in it have been positive but have had only a short-term impact. I visited the neighbourhood three times—in 2019, 2021, and 2022—and each time noticed the same neglected parking lot, garbage dump, and homeless shelter. Discarded syringes and burn

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27   Mizra Hamid is a pseudonym for the artist, who is also known as the 'Banksy of Iran', Mirza's red earth murals can be found on historic and modern buildings in Tehran. His works are popular in historic neighbourhoods such as Oudlajan and Sangeladge. A collection of his works has been exhibited at the New Gallery in Hudson, New York.

marks on the walls hinted strongly at the activities that happen every night.

The social injustice and devastating effects of the demolition and subsequent neglect, which created a wasteland in the middle of the neighbourhood, have been widely criticized. It is worth mentioning that several synagogues and historic houses of Tehran's Jewish community were among the demolished buildings. At the same time, the peaceful coexistence of diverse religious groups with the rich and the poor in Oudlajan has been promoted in heritage projects as the mark of historically developed social tolerance in Tehran. Considering the contradictions, the municipality's heritage projects in other parts of Oudlajan could be seen as an effort to restore its damaged political image after the demolition.

Figure 37: The Borazjan area in Oudlajan and Mirza Hamid's murals on its ruins

Author, 2022

Participatory urban renewal

The emergence of a rhetoric of participatory urban governance in Tehran's urban renewal practices can be attributed to the political reform during the 2010s and the subsequent increase in academic literature influenced by it.[28] The large-scale regeneration project undertaken in the Siroos neighbourhood, a constituent of the historic Chalmeidan Quarter, stands as a less than successful instance showcasing the reformists' application of participatory governance discourse. Despite the pronounced focus on inclusivity, the Siroos regeneration initiative encountered public disapproval due to its parallels with the Navab renovation project. Some felt that since the main investors in the project were linked to or favoured by the state, there was no genuine participation of the private sector and local communities in the project.[29] Residents of the area interviewed in a documentary film said that the authorities acquired as much land as possible and did not start the redevelopment project until more than a decade later when property prices reached a much higher level.[30] I visited the finished project in October 2021. As reported by the newspapers, the result was not so different from that of the Navab project.

From 2013 to 2021, Tehran's urban administration demonstrated a strong focus on reform, much like the government in power during that period. The city administration implemented various measures

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28   Abbas Akhundi et al., 'Hakemiyat-e Shar-Mantagheh-Ye Tehran: Chlesh-Ha va Ravand-Ha [The Governance Of The City-Region Of Tehran: Challenges And Processes]', *Honar-Ha-Ye-Ziba* 29, no. 29 (2007); Abbas Akhundi and Nasser Barkpour, 'Rahbord-Ha-Ye Esteghrar-e Nezam-e Hokmravai Dar Mantagheh-Ye Kalanshahr-e Tehran [Strategies For Establishing A Governance System In Greater Tehran]', *Rahbord* 57, no. 19 (2010): 297–324.

29   For example, the Director of the Urban Regeneration Company and Vice President of the Parliament's Urban Development Commission discussed this on a television programme. 'Bazafarini Mavane va Rahkar-Ha [Bazafarini Obstacles and Solutions]'.

30   *Siroos, Bood-o-Nabood-e Yek Mahalleh [Siroos,The Existence and Inexistence of a Neighbourhood]*, Documentary, (2014).

to control density selling, advocating for a sustainable long-term perspective in utilizing the city's available space and resources.[31] Some members of the city council attempted to restore urban density regulations in accordance with the approved 2007 Master Plan, reversing the changes made by the conservative government in 2012.[32] Furthermore, in 2014, the reformist Ministry of Roads and Urban Development (MRUD) collaborated with the Tehran City Council to further tighten density regulations. Additionally, heritage authorities introduced new regulations for buffer zones, imposing restrictions on redevelopment activities in historic and touristic areas.

Unsurprisingly, the density restrictions and heritage buffer zone regulations had adverse economic effects on private, state, and parastatal property owners. However, with the subsequent return of the conservative government and city council, conditions began to relax for those property owners who were dissatisfied with the stringent rules. In 2021, the mayor declared that the detailed plan should be reevaluated

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31   The arguments of key members of the city council and municipality were published in a special issue by the reformist magazine, Shargh at the end of the reformist city administration. Shargh Newspaper, *Vijhenameh-Ye Shahr va Shora-3 [Special Issue: City and Shura-3]*, ed. Mehdi Rahmanian (Tehran: Entekhab Resaneh, n.d.).

32   See: Saied Manavi, 'Taghirat-e Tarh-e Tafsili Che Bar Sar-e Tehran Avard? [What Damage Did the Changes to the Detailed Plan Do to Tehran?]', *Payam-e Ma Newspaper*, 15 May 2021, https://payamema.ir/p/55395; 'Taghirat-e Ahmadinejadi Tarh-e Tafsili-Ye Tehran Hazf Mishavad [Ahmadinejadian Changes in the Tehran Detailed Plan Will Be Removed]', *Alef Analytical News Association*, 5 May 2014; 'Joziyat-e Sabegheh-Ye Tarh-e Tafsili Dar Samaneh-Ye "Tehran-e Man" Montasher Mishavad [Extensive Background Information on the Detailed Plan Was Published in the "Tehran Man" Online System]', *ISNA*, 27 June 2020, isna.ir/xdG7HY.

and revised.[33] In social media[34] and conservative newspapers[35] city authorities talked about facilitating private investments in urban renewal, launching mega projects in cooperation with IRGC's Khatam-al Anbia Construction Headquarters, and improving living conditions in decaying neighbourhoods. These fluctuating policy changes are reflected in the inharmonious facades and skyline of the city centre (see Figure 38).

Figure 38: A skyline view of Sangeladge looking west from the rooftop of the Hajrajabali Mosque
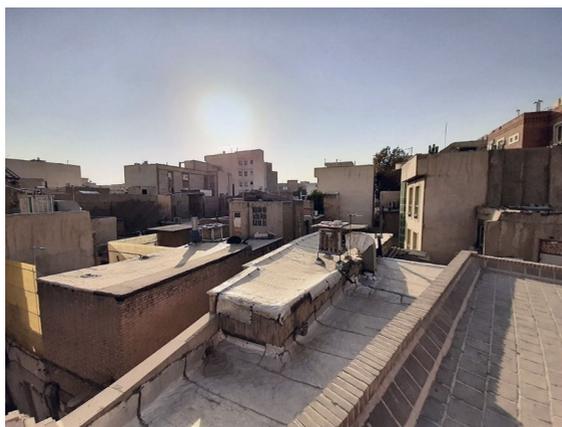
Author, 2021

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33   Fars, 'Zakani: Tarh-e Tafsili Bayad Bazbini Shavad [Zakani: The Detailed Plan Should Be Revised]', *Fars News Agency*, 2 January 2023, http://fna.ir/1u5oxj.

34   For instance, on the City Council's official Instagram page: http://instagram.com/shorashahrtehran

35   Fars, 'Az Tashil-e Sakht-o-Saz Dar Tehran Ta Raf-e Mozal-e Baft-e Farsoodeh [From Facilitating Construction in Tehran to Solving the Problem of Decayed Urban Built Environment]', *Fars News Agency*, 13 September 2021, http://fna.ir/3p3q6.

Perhaps the most positive demonstration of the participation discourse in Tehran was the establishment of Urban Renewal Offices (NDOs) in 2010, which acted as mediators between the neighbourhood residents, municipalities, and state organizations.[36] NDOs played an increasingly active role on-site and on social media, particularly in facilitating post-2013 urban regeneration policies. Part of their duty was to provide neighbourhood development documents as locally informed planning guidelines to be used by the municipal authorities.

To acquire an in-depth understanding of the socio-spatial dynamics in city centre of Tehran, I communicated with the local NDOs and joined some of their civic participation projects. As part of their work involved producing web content and communicating with potential participants through social media, I also followed their activities on Instagram between 2019 and 2022.

In my fieldwork, I witnessed that the trust and cooperation between the local communities and the young professionals working in the NDOs were remarkably higher than any measure of trust gained by government officials. I also found that to gain locals' trust, NDOs sometimes had to blur their boundaries with the officials. During instances of citizen participation initiatives, when NDOs interacted with volunteers, they did not always explicitly mention their administrative affiliation with the municipality.

The very fact that NDO workers did not look like government officials (who, in Iran, follow certain dress codes and administrative protocols) helped them more easily approach and collaborate with ordinary people. Also, the location of the offices (close to the homes or properties of the people concerned) and the absence of formal visitation protocols made NDOs seem more approachable compared to government

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36   Theorized and implemented in Tehran before the reformist administration, for instance by: 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]*; Hajaliakbari and Shafie, *Tose-Ye Mahalli: Chaharchoobi Bara-Ye Mahalleh-Ha-Ye Nakaramad [Neighborhood Development: A Framework for Dysfunctional Neighborhoods]*.

organizations. It could be argued that the municipality had made a deliberate—and clever—decision in involving NDOs at the intersection between official urban policymaking and everyday urban life. Among actor-network-inspired policy researchers, such strategies apply human and non-human boundary objects to reduce tension between two or more divergent environments.[37] Here, the offices were robust and adaptable enough to be able to function within both the municipal bureaucracy and everyday urban life.

Some NDO professionals even took on additional tasks of their own volition, without the support of further municipal funding.[38] Volunteers similarly became involved in these municipality projects, whether out of personal, professional, or economic interest, or to network with influential municipal authorities. The content produced and collected through the aforementioned activities, as well as the full-time on-site observations of the NDOs were captured in a database at the Urban Renovation Organization of the Municipality of Tehran.

In Sangeladge, for instance, I had the opportunity to witness the progress of the NDO in building a community-based organization (CBO). Through the office, a congenial online/offline environment was created for artists, Instagram influencers, journalists, filmmakers, property agents, investors, tour guides, and skilled volunteers from different fields to address the problems of Sangeladge. Groups connected in diverse ways with the neighbourhood participated, for example, in developing tourism, finding investors to conserve and reuse abandoned historic buildings, and solving environmental problems associated with waste management and the shoe and goldsmith workshops. Following

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37   Star and Griesemer, 'Institutional Ecology,Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907–39'; Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 'Informal Strategies of Power in the Local Planning System'.

38   Hajaliakbari and Shafie, *Tose-Ye Mahalli: Chaharchoobi Bara-Ye Mahalleh-Ha-Ye Nakaramad [Neighborhood Development: A Framework for Dysfunctional Neighborhoods]*.

the administrative changes in 2021 and after the termination of the office's activities, Sangeladge's CBO remained active.

Not surprisingly, this effective strategy of NDO deployment remained episodic. The NDOs' activities declined after the change in administration in August 2021. The neighbourhood development documents they produced were not applied, at least not during my fieldwork in Tehran. Some of the staff told me in informal conversations that the NDOs' activities were not considered necessary and did not fit into the ideological framework of the new administration. Two of the professionals I met while on the field emigrated to Europe by the end of my research.

Beautification

Progressive decentralization, especially following the Third Development Plan (2000–2005),[39] extended the remit of municipalities to conservation and heritage reuse projects; these had previously been a primary responsibility of the state, namely heritage authorities. Municipal authorities thus set up the Renovation Organization [Sazman-e Nosazi] and Beautification Organization [Sazman-e Zibasazi], which became key implementors of cultural heritage projects. These heritage projects, which were mostly limited in scale and budget, were not as economically rewarding for municipalities as urban renewal projects. However, their value emerged as property investments, considering the annual inflation of land prices and the increase in property values after beautification and reuse.

It has been argued that, in essence, the Renovation Organization focused primarily on urban renewal that was in economic and disciplinary

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

contradiction to conservation.[40] The involvement of the Beautification Organization in conservation projects was also criticized for its lack of expertise in cultural heritage. Critics argued that the organization's primary focus on beautifying public spaces and parks through a variety of urban artworks and murals could lead to superficial improvements to places of historic significance.[41] Nevertheless, by the 2010s, as the aforementioned organizations gained experience in adaptive reuse of historic buildings and beautification of historic streets, and established professional links with conservation practitioners, they became key implementing bodies of heritage planning in Tehran. Consequently, the reuse and beautification of historic areas in Tehran was implemented by the administrative and executive structures of urban renewal. Although conservation professionals worked on these municipal projects and heritage legislation was applied to listed buildings, the individuals I interviewed believed that the projects undertaken by the municipality differed from those of Ministry of Cultural Heritage in terms of working procedures and disciplinary and economic preferences. More precisely, although the Ministry of Cultural Heritage was tasked with tourism responsibilities, its legal and administrative structure, since the early 1980s, had been predominantly influenced by archaeology, art history, architectural history, and conservation. On the other hand, the Beautification Organization had its origins in urban renewal, which uses visual urban art and beautification strategies for tourism development and city marketing.

Urban renewal and beautification were tightly interdependent also in terms of the physical marks they left on the city centre.

The renewal projects and the decades-long neglect of the city's built heritage left the municipality with too little to build on when urban heritage planning became a priority. Although planning in a heritage desert was challenging, the municipality's interventions in Tehran showed the

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40   Mohammadreza Azimi and Yashar Soltani, 'Shahrdari Ba Miras-e Tarikhi Che Khahad Kard? [What Will the Municipality Do with Historic Heritage?]' (Bahamestan-Majma-e Hagh-e Bar Shahr, Tehran, 22 July 2015).

41   Ibid.

potential for rather free-handed beautification and stylistic reconstruction, creating an urban heritage tailored to the spatial-economic structures and political discourses already in place.

The municipality's heritage-related projects in the city centre began in the mid-2000s with the façade beautification programme. An early example that technically informed later projects was carried out in the Marvi commercial axis. The solutions used in Marvi, for instance hiding electricity cables behind structurally independent brick claddings decorated with tile and brickwork,[42] can be found in almost all later projects, for example, in Oudlajan, Khayam, and Naser Khosrow.[43]

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42   Somayeh Fadaee Nejad, 'Behsazi, Nosazi va Bazsazi Dar Gozar-e Marvi [Rehabilitation, Renovation, and Reconstruction in Marvi Street]', *Honar-Ha-Ye-Ziba* 32, no. 32 (2007): 61–71.

43   Pirooz Hanachi, Mozaffar Farhang, and Yaser Jafari, 'Hefazat Az Manzar-e Shahri Tarikhi Da Jedareh-Ha-Ye Tejari; Tabyin-e Chaharchoob-e Modakheleh Bar Mabnay-e Tajarob-e Behsazi Khiyaban-e Naser Khosrow Tehran [Protection of the Historic Townscape on Commercial Facades; Outlining the Intervention Framework Based on the Experience of the Redevelopment of Naser Khosrow Street in Tehran.]', *Motaleate Shahr-e Irani-Eslami* 8, no. 32 (2018): 77–88.

*Figure 39: Examples of beautification works in Marvi, the bazaar neighbour-
hood, and Khayam Street*
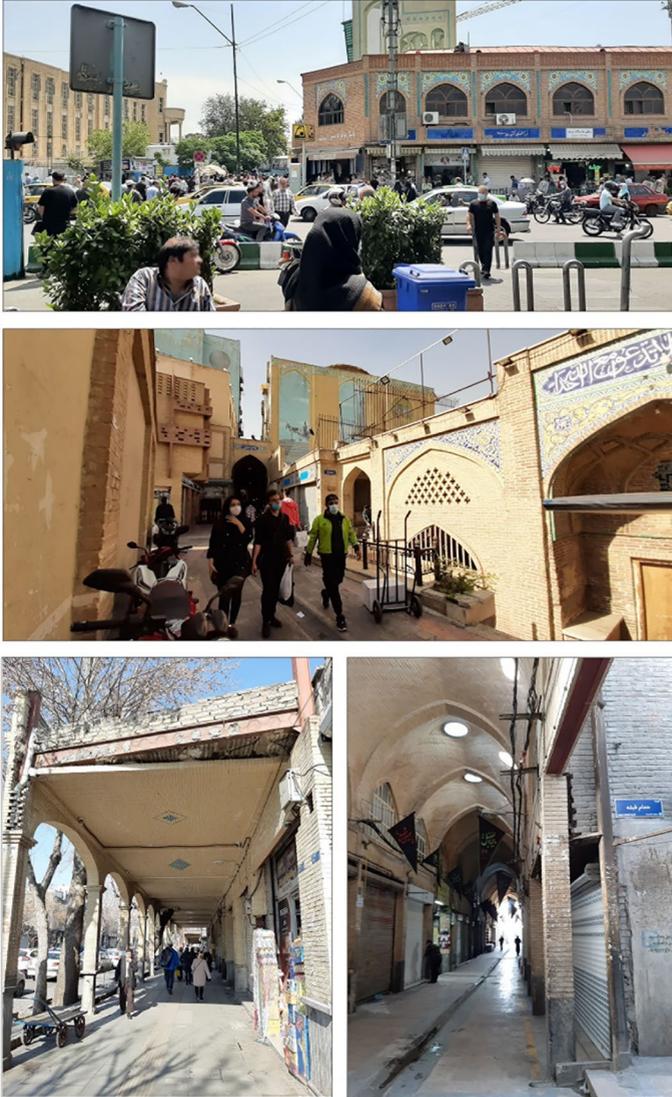
Author, 2020–2022

Oudlajan Cluster Bazaar

A widely discussed beautification and reuse project was carried out in the Oudlajan Cluster Bazaar, located in the north of the Grand Bazaar. In 2012, heritage authorities, the District 12 municipality, and shopkeepers signed an agreement to create a traditional handicraft bazaar in the physically declining area. This locale had hitherto accommodated wholesalers and warehouses primarily dealing in construction materials. A byproduct of this agreement was the obligate transformation of the existing businesses, compelling them to alter the nature of their activities. The municipality and University of Tehran supported this agreement and the NDO coordinated the project. The promise that the project would be completed within six months encouraged shopkeepers to participate in the project. Although the formal plan seemed coherent, the project dragged on for more than four years.

I interviewed a professional involved in the project and had the opportunity to talk informally with other practitioners engaged in the project at the events I attended in Tehran. They all put the delays down to the administrative changes in the middle of the project resulting from the major political changes at the ICHHTO in 2012–13. The new heritage authorities had not wanted to continue the project, as one interviewee suggested, "because of a lack of personal interest", which points to the familiar pattern of substantial policy changes during transition periods between administrations.

In the new administration, the project was finished with a beautification of a back alley of the cluster bazaar that also functioned as a storage and workshop area serving the bazaar. The authorities had asked the consultants to quickly design a traditional façade, since much of the original was missing. The project aimed to limit motorbike and vehicle access to the beautified area.

When I visited in 2021 and 2022, motorbikes were still occupying the walkways in the back alley. The handicraft bazaar was not functioning as effectively as the rest of the business district. As per my conversations with the shopkeepers, they were struggling to keep their businesses open. They attributed this struggle to the implementation of a top-down reuse policy for the restored shops, which focused on promot-

ing the sale of traditional handicrafts. The area had failed to gain recognition as a prime location for purchasing high-quality crafts due to its historical role as a wholesale centre for building materials over the course of many decades. One shopkeeper displayed the legally allowed handicraft products in the window and stored the illegal but profit-making wholesale PVC products behind the counter. Some did not even bother to hide the products they were actually selling. Another owner was looking for somebody who could take over the shop and turn it into a handicraft shop.

Figure 40: Oudlajan Cluster Bazaar

Author, 2021

Between 2019 and 2021, I participated in a series of public meetings called 'Wednesdays of Tehran', where projects enacted during the reformist city administration were discussed by experts, celebrities, and the public. The meetings were usually held at the municipality-owned Book Garden in Tehran's Abbasabad district. An event on Oudlajan was organized on Wednesday evening, 15 January 2020, at Sarvestan Hall, a public area near the bookshops. Visitors could join in the discussions or listen to the lectures. Uncharacteristically for a lecture organized by

the municipality, the atmosphere was casual and with limited official control.

Figure 41: The beautified back alley of the Oudlajan Cluster Bazaar

Author, 2022

To start, a short film was screened featuring interviews with Pirooz Hanachi, Professor of Conservation at the University of Tehran and Mayor of Tehran during the reformist city council's term, as well as members of the city council, such as Masjed Jamei, former Minister of Islamic Guidance during Khatami's administration. The film gave a positive impression of the Cluster Bazaar project's results, focusing on tourism, and ended with the song 'Khushe-chin' sung by the pre-Revolutionary singer Gholam-Hossein Banan.[44] I noticed that the song was also used at other events organized by the reformist urban government. The lyrics and melody evoked hope and motivation for the development of Iran despite the challenges the country faced. The event,

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44   Gholam-Hossein Banan (1911–1986) was a prominent Iranian performer and musician. He is considered a pioneer of modern Iranian pop music, which blends elements of traditional Iranian music with Western pop music and jazz.

its location, and its visual and pictorial elements echoed reformist hopes for progress, cultural tolerance, participation, and Islamic democracy.

After the film screening and lectures, some among the audience criticized the project's outcome—a structurally independent brick cladding in front of the existing facades—for being merely decorative and having no social impact. As mentioned, the municipality had experimented with a similar brick cladding solution in previous beautification projects. The consulting planner responded to the critique by arguing that the structure was safer in the event of an earthquake, improved the skyline, and did not interfere with ongoing commercial activities: "We [intentionally] put makeup on this decaying alley in the hope of triggering a change that would stop the blind progression of the bazaar toward other parts of the neighbourhood".

When I asked him about the participatory decision-making that the project claimed, he replied, "our target group for the survey included renowned experts, as well as public and private project stakeholders". Since most of the residents of the neighbourhood have moved out, the property owners are mostly merchants from the bazaar or the owners of the warehouses, workshops and wholesale businesses associated with the bazaar. A filmmaker, who was also invited as a speaker answered the question in a more direct manner, saying: "We all look at the city from above, like Naser al-Din Shah, who viewed this area from the top of Shamsol-emareh".[45] Hinting at the autocratic approach to planning, he said "things had not changed much" since the reign of the Qajar Shah. After these statements, the planner ultimately admitted that building a decorative facade was not necessarily ideal: "We planners and architects are not the ones who set the rules of the game. So what remains up to us is the physical space."

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45   The Qajar ruler, Naser al-Din Shah, oversaw the construction of Shamsol-emareh, Naser Khosrow Street, and the expansion of Tehran in the mid to late 19th century, solidifying its status as the capital of Iran.

Enghelab-e Eslami Street

One of the early examples of beautification projects in Tehran was carried out by the municipality on Enghelab-e Eslami Street (Enghelab Street).[46] After the establishment of Tehran University in 1939 on this street, located along the northern walls of Qajar City, the area gradually became an intellectual and political hub, housing the City Theatre, several cinemas, publishing houses, bookshops, and cafes.

The beautification project in Enghelab Street included the section between the Ferdowsi and Valia-e Asr junctions, which featured facades typical of Tehran's modern architecture during the 1960s and 1970s. The project drew on the expertise of sociologists, planners, and architects provided by an NDO who worked on the ground with local stakeholders. Relatively speaking, due to the recent construction of buildings in the area and its location at the edge of the Grand Bazaar's sphere of influence, the street had managed to retain some of its residential character. As a result, the Enghelab Street area attracted many private investors for the adaptive reuse of historic buildings compared to the neighbourhoods adjacent to the bazaar. According to the project consultant, new startups and several galleries and cafes were drawn to the area following its beautification and the cafes that already existed on the street since the 1960s became more popular.[47]

As we shall see next, beautification, adaptive reuse, and storytelling have been key themes in Tehran's heritage planning policy over the past decade. And city tours, reuse projects, and beautification measures have materially and discursively included urban spaces like Enghelab in Tehran's urban heritage assemblage. On one of my revisits to Enghelab, I accompanied two young planners from an NDO in Oudlajan who guided a series of city tours called 'Strolling through the veins of

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46   Before the 1979 Revolution, Enghelab Street was known as Shah Reza Street. The English translation of its present name is "Islamic Revolution Street".

47   Amirmasoud Anoushfar, Maremmat-e Shahri, Nemooneh-ye Khiyaban-e Enghelab [Urban Conservation for the Case of Enghelab Street], interview by Fereydoon Farahani, Instagram Live, 3 March 2021, Anjoman-e Mafakher-e Memari Iran.

Tehran'. When I talked to one of the guides, she said that the idea for the tour came from her master's thesis on strolling in the city, based on Walter Benjamin's concept of the flâneur.[48] She saw the tours as a multi-purpose opportunity to pursue her passion for documenting and drawing attention to graffiti art and modern architecture in Tehran. Here we see how ideas and resources from the academic, administrative, and professional realms of urban heritage can come together to assemble and present urban heritage to the public.

But urban heritage assemblage does not always unfold as planned. As demonstrated in the case of the Transnational Railway, or the Azadi Tower, the public is likely to make unpredictable contributions to the urban heritage assemblage. The visitors, of whom only one was not from Tehran, seemed to experience a nostalgic and artistic joy as they passed the corrected facades and were occasionally surprised by the metal tiles on the pedestrian walkways, decorated with heart motifs and lyrics of Mohamadreza Shajarian's popular songs.[49] At certain points during the stroll, tourists recalled and spoke of the November 2019 events[50] in Enghelab and the Girls of Revolution Street.[51] You cannot walk past France Pastry in Enghelab without recalling the public image of the first Girl

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48   The concept is for example discussed in: Sven Birkerts, 'Walter Benjamin, Flâneur: A Flânerie', *The Iowa Review*, 1982, 164–79; Keith Tester, *The Flâneur* (London: Psychology Press, 1994).

49   Prominent vocalist, Mohammad-Reza Shajarian (1940–2020) was an inspiring figure in the pro-democracy movement in Iran, including the Green Movement of 2009.

50   In November 2019, protests broke out across Iran after the government announced a sudden increase in the price of petrol. The government responded to the protests with a violent crackdown and an internet blackout.

51   See: Faegheh Shirazi, 'The Veiling Issue in 20th Century Iran in Fashion and Society, Religion, and Government', *Religions* 10, no. 8 (2019): 461; '"Girls of Revolution St" Protest Ignites Debate on Iran's Compulsory Hijab', *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, 2018, https://iranhumanrights.org/2018/01/girls-of-revolution-st -protest-ignites-debate-on-irans-compulsory-hijab/.

of the Revolution, Vida Movahed, standing on an electricity box right in front of the bakery with her headscarf tied to a stick.[52]

Like the general public, the interplay between political groups and the unfolding urban heritage is also unpredictable. In August 2021, during the tense presidential election, news and online media reported that France Pastry had been sued for using Pahlavi-era symbols on its pastry boxes.[53] Following the news, pictures of the boxes, especially those showing the Fifth Festival of Arts of 1969 in Shiraz appeared on social media. Some immediately interpreted the event as a sign of the government's fear of reviving any memory of the pre-Revolutionary period. Some posted Vida Movahed's picture in front of the bakery, saying the place was a trigger for distant and near memories. Twitter users posted pictures of pastry boxes depicting a sweepstake by the Iran National Company giving a Paykan buyer a free supply of petrol for seven years, linking it to the crackdown on protests against the November 2019 petrol price increases.[54] Some argued that the temporary closure had nothing to do with the boxes, but was due to the bakery's failure to follow COVID-19 hygiene protocols. Regardless of the actual underlying cause of the event, opinions on social media portrayed a struggle for public space, a struggle that turned brutal in the autumn of 2022.

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52   RFE/RL's Radio Farda, 'Iconic Iranian Antihijab Protester Jailed For One Year; Human Rights Lawyer's 13-Year Sentence Upheld', *Radio Farda*, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/iconic-iranian-antihijab-protester-jailed-for-year/29879887.html.

53   'Qanadi-Ye Faranse Az Mohr-Omum-e Maghazeh-Ye Khod Be Dalil-e 'Tarh-e Ruy-e Jabe'-Hayash Khabar Dar [The French Confectionery Announced the Seal of Its Shop Because of the 'Design on the Boxes It Used']', *BBC-Persian*, 21 August 2021, shorturl.at/jxQ39.

54   In the 1960s, Iran National introduced the Paykan, which was the first domestically manufactured car in Iran.

Figure 42: Examples of beautified facades in Enghelab Street

Author, 2020

Figure 43: Top, Vida Movahed in front of France Pastry[55] and bottom, the bakery

Author, 2022

55   Shirazi, 'The Veiling Issue in 20th Century Iran in Fashion and Society, Religion, and Government'.

Figure 44: Tiles with lyrics from Shajarian's popular songs

Author, 2020

Figure 45: Two visitors sitting in front of the bakery's picture of the 1960s

Author, 2022

Figure 46: Pastry boxes of France Pastry, left: Fifth Shiraz Art Festival[56] and right: Reconstruction of the censored box based on the original posters of the festival

Author, 2023

An unfulfilled place-making dream: Reading Henri Lefebvre and Jane Jacobs in Tehran

Founded in 1851 by Amir Kabir, Darolfonun was a polytechnic college that not only initiated modern higher education in Iran but also played a vital role in the reform of the state apparatus by educating Iranian civil servants. Over a span exceeding ten years, diverse stakeholders, including heritage authorities, the Ministry of Education, Municipality of Tehran, and Iran's National Elites Foundation [57](Bonyad-e Melli-e Nokhbegan), had been actively advocating for the formulation of a re-use policy for Darolfonun in alignment with their respective interests. In early 2020, as part of the ongoing struggle on the future use of Darolfonun, the Association of Iranian Architects organized an event called 'Darolfonun, an un-

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56   'Shirini-Ye Faranse Polomp Shod [The French Pastry Was Sealed]', *Asrshahrvand*, accessed 3 September 2022, https://asrshahrvand.com/?p=283818.

57   National Elites Foundation is a governmental institution under the presidential office.

fulfilled dream' [*Darolfonun, royay-e natamam*].[58] In debating the future of the historic school,[59] leading members of ICOM-Iran and ICOMOS-Iran characterized it as a physical reminder of Qajar Chief Minister Mirza Taqi Khan Amirkabir's dream for state reform, which was disrupted after his assassination. While speakers felt that Amirkabir's plans failed because of his top-down approach to modernization and his neglect of tradition, the underlying struggle to effect any measure of reform in the current Islamic and tradition-oriented state was palpable between the lines. The speakers expressed the desire to preserve the building's identity as a school that would stimulate progressive change and provide an inclusive space for the broader civil society. In the following sections, we will see that the destiny of Tehran's reform-oriented urban assemblage was comparable to that of Darolfonun. Both endured as unfulfilled, half-realized dreams.

Urban heritage assemblage in Tehran, and particularly its place-making elements emerged on the existing administrative and spatial-economic structures of top-down urban renewal and beautification. When the renewal and beautification measures were about to turn into place-making, indicating the possibility of partial convergence with liberal and Western discourses, they were halted or reverted to a purely physically oriented renewal and beautification.

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58   Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti, former head of the ICHO during President Khatami's term, and Seyyed Ahmad Mohit Tabatabai, Director of ICOM/Iran and former ICHO Deputy also during Khatami's term were two of the speakers. The meeting was organized on Wednesday, 8 January 2020 at Naqsh-e Jahan Art Research Centre, Tehran.

59   See: John Gurney and Negin Nabavi, 'Dār Al-Fonūn', *Encyclopædia Iranica* 6 (1993): 662–68.

During the mid-2010s, Tehran's urban development policy[60] began to prioritize the internationally recognized concept of Historic Urban Landscape (HUL), which incorporates social inclusion.[61] While the beautification approach of the municipality sought to engage stakeholders directly involved in the economic aspects of the projects, the new HUL-inspired urban regeneration projects claimed to reach out to broader social groups. Parallel to the progress of the urban regeneration discourse and HUL in 2010s, academic publications and translations of works on right to the city, walkability, and place-making increased.[62] Most scholarly works—including supervision of dissertations—were conducted by bureaucrat-academics affiliated with the Municipality of Tehran and the MRUD.

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60   For instance in: Paramadan Engineers Municipality of Tehran, 'Bayaniyeh va sanad-e rahbordi-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); Islamic City Council of Tehran, 'Barnameh-Ye Panjsaleh-Ye Sevom-e Tose-Ye Shar-e Tehran (1398–1402) [The Third Development Plan of Tehran (2019–2023)]' (Islamic City Council of Tehran, 2018), 46.

61   Tehran's official urban heritage planning policy (see the previous footnote) is strongly influenced by the discourse on Historic Urban Landscape. See: UNESCO, 'Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape'.

62   S. Mehdi Moini, 'Afzayesh-e Ghabeliyat-e Piyadehmadari, Gami Be Suy-e Shahri Ensani-Tar [Enhancing Walkability, a Step Towards a More Humane City]', *Honar-Ha-Ye-Ziba* 27, no. 27 (2006); S. Mehdi Moini, *Shahr-Ha-Ye Piyadehmadar [Walkable Cities]* (Tehran: Azarakhsh, 2011); Jan Gehl and Birgitte Svarre, *How to Study Public Life*, trans. Mohammad Saeid Izadi, Samaneh Mohammadi, and Samaneh Kheibari (Tehran: Elm-o-Sanat University Press, 2015); Roberts and Sykes, *Urban Regeneration: A Handbook*; Mohammad Saeid Izadi, 'Sokhan-e Modir Masoul: Tahaghogh-e Gofteman-e Hagh-e Bar Shahr, Shart-e Lazem-e Bazafarini-Ye Paydar [Editorial: The Realisation of the Right to the City Discourse Is the Prerequisite for Sustainable Urban Regeneration]', *HaftShahr* 4, no. 49–50 (2015): 2–3.

Tehran's Third Development Plan placed emphasis on place-making based on collective memory.[63] The assemblage of the policy along with human and non-human actors, including city council members,[64] bureaucrat-academics and their publications,[65] and public spaces in the city centre, sparked a series of formal and informal storytelling initiatives in Tehran.

For example, the city administration involved the neighbourhood councils[66] in events such as the 2019 'Story of Tehran' Festival, where citizens' memories of their neighbourhoods were collected and exhibited as a means of promoting social solidarity.[67] In the space created by

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63   Islamic City Council of Tehran, 'Barnameh-Ye Panjsaleh-Ye Sevom-e Tose-Ye Shar-e Tehran (1398–1402) [The Third Development Plan of Tehran (2019–2023)]', para. 46.

64   Ahmad Masjedjamei, *Negahi Be Darvazeh Ghar [A Glimpse of the Darvazeh Ghar]* (Tehran: Sales, 2015); Ahmad Masjedjamei, *Jesm-o-Jan-e Shahr [The Body and Soul of the City]* (Tehran: Rozaneh, 2016).

65   Naser Takmil Homayoun, *Ruydad-Ha va Yadmanha-Ye Tarikhi-Ye Tehran, Az Darolkhelafeh-Ye Naseri Ta Piroozi-Ye Mashrooteh [Historical Events and Monuments in Tehran, from the Naseri Caliphate to the Victory of the Constitutional Revolution]* (Tehran: Cultural Research Bureau, 2015); Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti Shirazi, *Dastan-e Tehran [The Story of Tehran]* (Tehran: Cultural Research Bureau, 2016); Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti Shirazi, *Revitalisation of Tehran, Reflections on the Quality Improvement of Historic Fabric*, Tehran Pajhouhi (Tehran: Cultural Research Bureau, 2017); Seyyed Mohsen Habibi et al., *Khatereh-Ye Shahr, Bazkhani-Ye Sinematografik-e Shahr-e Irani: Dahe-Ha-Ye 1340–1350 [The Memory of the City, a Cinematographic Reencounter with the Iranian City: 1960s-1970s]* (Tehran: Nahid, 2014).

66   *Shorayari-ha* or Neighbourhood Councils operate under the City Council to assist and advise the City Council and the community. Tehran City Council, 'Eslah-e Mavaredi Az Mosavabeh-Ye Tashkil-e Anjoman-Ha-Ye Shorayari-Ye Shar-e Tehran [Amendment of Articles of the Decree on Establishment of Neighbourhood Councils in Tehran]', Pub. L. No. 2560 (2019).

67   As mentioned by a city council member in a meeting with neighbourhood councils. Tehran City Council, 'Ahmad Masjedjamei: Shahr Ra Ba Mosharekat-e Namayandegan-e Mahalat Edare Konim [Masjedjamei: Run the City with the Participation of Local Representatives]', *Councilorship Coordination Headquarters of Tehran Islamic City Council*, 2019, Content code: 4138.

municipality-organized events such as 'Wednesdays of Tehran', celebrities, authors, filmmakers, artists, planners, and architects gathered to discuss municipality projects. During such events, beautification projects were linked to nostalgic views of old Tehran, with its music, films, and history. Although the content presented by the organizers reflected the official communication strategies of the municipality, the selected venues and their atmosphere allowed some degree of informal and critical arguments by the speakers and the audience. I witnessed that at such events actors met and formed informal collaborations and friendships.

In addition, the Fifth and Sixth National Development Plans (effective between 2011–2021)[68] called on government organizations to consider social media and digital technologies in their management strategies. As a result, by the mid-2010s, entities such as the Municipality of Tehran, its sub-organizations, and NDOs had launched their Instagram pages.

In that period, the city administration focused on expanding public spaces and promoting vibrant nightlife in the city centre.[69] The slogan used was "Tehran: A city for all".[70] By the second half of the 2010s, concepts of storytelling and place-making were widely circulated in public and professional events throughout Tehran[71] as well as on Twitter, Insta-

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68   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]'; 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]'.

69   Islamic City Council of Tehran, 'Barnameh-Ye Panjsaleh-Ye Sevom-e Tose-Ye Shar-e Tehran (1398–1402) [The Third Development Plan of Tehran (2019–2023)]', para. 47.

70   Islamic City Council of Tehran, 'Barnameh-Ye Dr. Hanachi [Dr. Hnachi's Program for Mayorship]' (Tehran, 29 April 2018), http://shora.tehran.ir/Portals/0/pdf/go zaresh dar sahn/برنامه دکتر حناچی.pdf.

71   The municipality has reported part of the mentioned debates: Public and International Relations Municipality of Tehran, 'Baztab-e Mehvar-Ha-Ye Goftemani-Ye Modiriyat-e Shahri Da Eghdamat-e Shahrdari-Ye Tehran (1396–1399) [Dis-

gram, and Telegram groups, which I observed during my fieldwork between 2019 and 2021. Tehrani professionals and civil society would talk about the ideas of Henri Lefebvre,[72] Jane Jacobs[73] and Jan Gehl[74] on place and place-making and how these could be translated in the city. The discussions took place for example on the Instagram pages of NDOs and city council members, as well as in the course of online and offline meetings about the recently pedestrianized streets of the city centre.

Considering that many authoritarian political systems favour control and supervision of NGOs, rather than eliminating them altogether, the aforementioned coordination between Tehran's civil society and the city administration is not an unexpected phenomenon.[75] At least during the years I followed the urban heritage assemblage in Tehran, civil society was restrained from exceeding the official policies of the reformist city administration. Civil society thus functioned in cooperation with the official urban politics.

The 2006 Detailed Plan of District 12 envisaged a pedestrian network (see Figure 47) in the city centre that would connect local tourist attractions, including monuments and museums.[76] As Izadi and members of the Tehran professional community who had been advocating

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course Lines of Urban Management in the Tehran Municipality's Actions between 2017 and 2021]' (Tehran Picture Agency, 2021).

72 Henri Lefebvre and Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space* (Wiley, 1991), https://books.google.de/books?id=SIXcnIoa4MwC.

73 Jane Jacobs, *The Death Andlife of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1961).

74 Jan Gehl, *Cities for People* (Island press, 2013).

75 David Lewis, 'Civil Society and the Authoritarian State: Cooperation, Contestation and Discourse', *Journal of Civil Society* 9, no. 3 (2013): 325–40.

76 Bavand Consulting Engineers, 'The Detailed Plan of Tehran's 12th District'.

for the project[77] explained at one of the public events,[78] the network would connect the bazaar and the already beautified areas such as Marvi, Naser Khosrow, and Panzdah-e Khordad streets with Si-e Tir, Bab-e Homayoun, Lalehzar, Toopkhaneh Square and Bagh-e Melli. The expanding spatial network would bring together municipal projects with the Tehran tourism sector, the Tehran researchers and historians, several of whom worked part-time in the tourism sector, the NDOs, and the food and leisure services.

Places like Si-e Tir and Bab-e Homayoun, which were originally popular spots for food carts or cafe-vans,[79] who used to inform their customers of their location via social media, gradually became 'food streets'[80] consisting of rows of food stalls that the municipality rented out to small businesses. These food streets received criticism on social media and in public events for undermining the historic value of the city

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77   Launched in 2017, 'Taraneh-ye Tehran' was perhaps the largest and most acti-ve professional group, with more than 1,300 members ranging from students, journalists, architects, and planners from the private sector to (former) minis-ters and high-ranking heritage and municipal officials. I got to know this group through their campaign to save the Vartan House of Urban Dialogue and joined the Telegram group in December 2019. During my research stays in Tehran, I had the opportunity to attend their in-person meetings. Regular debates at the Vartan House declined due to the COVID-19 lockdowns and the closure of the Vartan House after the resignation of the MRUD minister. Following the poli-tical changes in 2021, the group continued its debates on Telegram. However, their links with the city administration decreased significantly.

78   29th Session of Wednesdays of Tehran, Book Garden, 1 January 2020

79   Hamshahri, 'Hoshdar Be Van-Kafe-Ha-Ye Tehran Ke Mojavez Nadarand: Sabr-e Maraje-e Ghanuni Hadi Darad [Warning To Tehran Café-Vans That Don't Have A Licence; Judicial Authorities' Patience Has A Limit]', *Hamshahrionline*, 2 June 2023, hamshahrionline.ir/x8jdG.

80   Amin Rahimi, 'Shabneshini Be Sarf-e Aramesh, Food Street-e Khiaban-e Si-e Tir Patogh-e Shabaneh Baray-Ye Khanevadeh-Ha [Night Stop For Recreation, The Food Street In Si Tir Street Is A Nightly Meeting Place For Families]', *Hamshahri*, 26 May 2018.

centre and causing environmental pollution affecting local residents and public buildings such as hospitals in the area.[81]

Yet, when the city council began to discuss a legal draft concerning the Utilization of Pedestrian Ways, it was met with heavy criticism.[82] The legislation granted the municipality the authority to regulate street vendors in public spaces and lease pedestrian walkways exclusively to qualified business owners. Some justifiably warned that the place-making assemblage was going to gentrify Tehran, arguing that the unsustainable density selling was not so different from selling the streets to the private sector (referring to the reformist city council's measures in limiting density selling on the one hand and passing the bill, on the other).[83]

In short, Tehran's tourism industry and the municipality were the outright winners of pedestrianization and beautification. To have a closer look at the relationships among the actors involved in Tehran's urban heritage assemblage, in addition to online ethnography, I participated in several city tours organized by individuals who collaborated with the city administration. The guides led tourists through the pedestrian areas to collect bits and pieces of the city centre's story linked to the museums and monuments along the way.

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81   For example, the topic was discussed by Mohammad Saied Izadi, Zahra Tara-
      neh Yalda and the audience in one of Tehran Wednesday events at Abbas Abad
      Book Garden on 20 October 2019. The same issues were underlined in an online
      event organized by the Association of Iranian Architects (Anjoman-e Mafakher-
      e Memari Iran) on 12 August 2020.

82   Tehran City Council, 'Gozaresh-e Tafsili Dar Khosus-e Layehe-Ye 'Tarh-e Bahreb-
      ardari Az Piadehro-Ha [Detailed Report on the Bill on the Utilization of Pede-
      strian Ways]' (Tehran Ciity Council-Archive, 2020).

83   See, for example, the arguments of civil activist M. Karim Asayesh and a for-
      mer member of the reformist city council here: Sogol Danati, M. Karim Asayesh,
      and Zahra Nejadbahram, 'Dastandazi Be Piyadehro-Ha [Encroachment on Si-
      dewalks]', *Payam-e Ma Newspaper*, 14 December 2020, 1900 edition, Encroach-
      ment on Sidewalks.

Figure 47: The city centre's pedestrian network as outlined in the 2006 Detailed Plan of District 12[84]
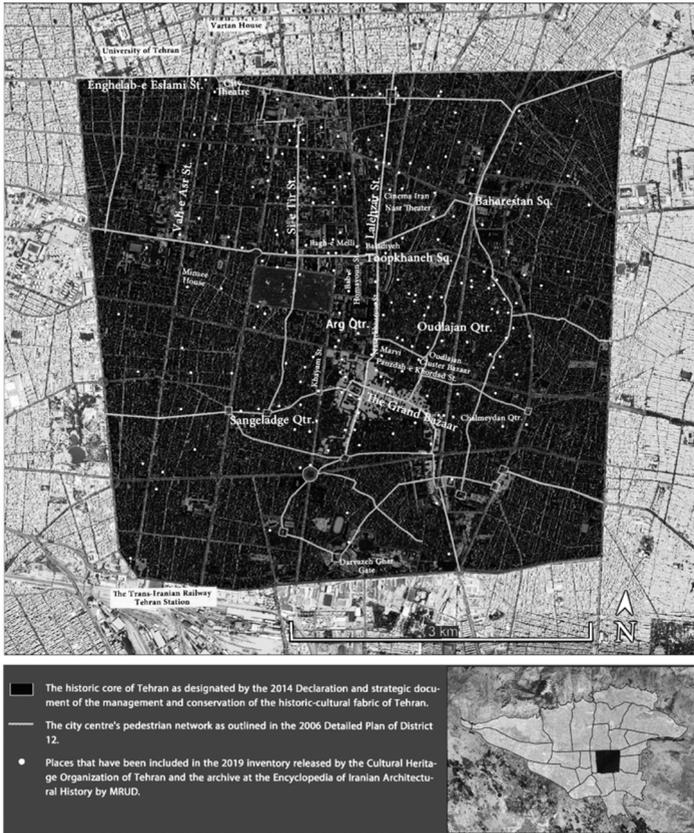
Figure 48: Food street in Bab-e Homayoun

Author, 2022

Whether or not they were aware of the official policy navigating storytelling in Tehran, young professionals working in the NDOs, historians, journalists, and architects mixed the official storytelling elements with their own professional and personal areas of interest. Some had a passion for modern architecture and graffiti art, others for Qajar history and architecture. In their informal interaction with the city and the visitors, most of whom were from Tehran, some pointed out places associated with taboo political events. Some organized tours around location tourism [*lokeyshen-gardi*] featured famous shooting locations of pre- and post-Revolutionary films and shows. Others used the tours to monitor and document buildings and to denounce possible damage or vandalism in newspapers and on social media.

Some tour guides, recognized as 'Tehran researchers'—and among them, a few that happen to operate nostalgic cafes and maintain popular Instagram pages—also actively participated in the cultural initiatives organized by the municipality. The city administration's collaboration with local private actors on such initiatives seemed quite consequential. However, what struck me as a native of Tehran was the unprecedented degree of synergy between official and non-official discursive and infrastructural urban elements in their collaboration.

I analyzed the content of the 'Tehranstories' Instagram account, which live-streamed programmes and cultural content for the municipality. Within the fusion of symbols communicated on the account, there was a blending of the official identity discourse with the memories of the ordinary public. On the one hand, the conservative narrative surrounding the war with Iraq in the 1980s intertwined with romantic allusions to the Qajar period, representing the reformist Islamic-Iranian identity discourse. The inclusion of the Golha music programme alongside the above content, on the other hand, tapped into the audience's nostalgic longing for the 1960s and 1970s.[85]

By examining the content of online communications, book publications, and newspaper interviews of the various actors involved—ranging from the city council to the municipality and its affiliated organizations, as well as tourism influencers—I sought to build a picture of the urban heritage model for Tehran they were collectively pursuing. In the urban heritage model that the reformists sought to establish, one could spot the unveiled female harpist of the Nasr Theatre in Lalehzar, an image of the Golha Orchestra with the female singer, Marziyeh[86] sitting in a corner, layered with officially approved icons such as veiled Qajar women and Morteza Ahmadi.[87] Under this model, municipality- and state-owned historic buildings and beautified public spaces in the city centre synergized with private tour agencies and nostalgic cafes. In this model of urban heritage, social media, NDOs, influencers, public events, music, and significant locations and monuments served as boundary objects that had the potential to partially alleviate the strained relationship between citizens and the government.

Similar to the strategy of deploying NDOs at the borders between the urban bureaucracy and everyday urban life, here, tangible and intangible objects were applied to glue together the deeply divided official and non-

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85   For the history of the programmes see: Jane Lewisohn, 'Flowers of Persian Song and Music: Davud Pirniā and the Genesis of the Golhā Programs', *Journal of Persianate Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 79–101.

86   Marziyeh (1924–2010) iconic singer of the 1960s and 1970s.

87   Morteza Ahmadi (1924–2014), Tehranian folk music singer and actor.

official discourses. A wide range of actors participated in the urban heritage assemblage orchestrated by the city administration in accordance with their political affiliation, and the economic and spatial resources available to them.

However, the online content produced by individuals and groups with formal or informal relations with the municipality, as well as the spaces restored by the municipality, show a tendency towards tolerating specific historical periods more than others. As the central arena of Iran's political history since 1786, the capital offered the spatial and discursive possibilities for assembling an urban heritage that would focus on the Qajar[88] and Pahlavi[89] periods. Dealing with Iran's more recent past could put conservative factions of the government on edge. After all, as David Lowenthal noted, drawing on Sigmund Freud, we tend to admire our grandparents' relics while rejecting parental ones, perhaps because the immediate past could mean confronting an uncomfortable heritage.[90] Despite its monarchical identity, Tehran's Qajar background was remote enough to avoid constituting 'uncomfortable heritage'.[91] Instead, it offered traditional and religious features that fit within the framework of the overarching policy that called for the promotion of Islamic-Iranian architecture and urban planning.[92] In addition, the Constitutional Revolution conformed to both the Revolutionary and reformist identities of policymakers. Thus, one could say that the late

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88   Rulers from 1794 to 1925.

89   Rulers from 1925 to 1979.

90   David Lowenthal, 'Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory', *Geographical Review* 65, no. 1 (1975): 1–36, doi:10.2307/213831.

91   See: John Pendlebury, Yi-Wen Wang, and Andrew Law, 'Re-Using "Uncomfortable Heritage": The Case of the 1933 Building, Shanghai', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24, no. 3 (2018): 211–29.

92   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]'; 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]'.

Qajar period, including the constitutional movements leading to the Constitutional Revolution until the Pahlavi rule could represent the least uncomfortable heritage for Tehran.

Figure 49: Instances of social media content within the sphere of boundary action, aiming to bridge the gap between collective memories and the established political narrative of Tehran's past [93]
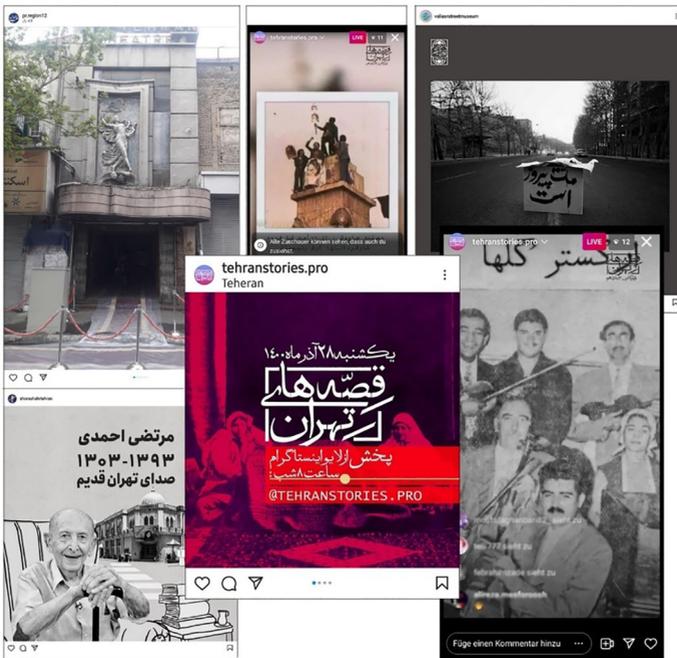
On several occasions I observed art and architecture from the Qajar period revisited with a more empathetic perspective than the one offered by the modernist Pahlavi reading.[94] Some have seen the revisiting of Qajar architectural heritage as a way to undo the mistakes of the Pahlavis, who were believed to have neglected this period and erased it from Tehran's cityscape.[95] The topic was debated, for example in Telegram group discussions commenting on newspaper articles written by Ahmad Shah Qajar's granddaughter.[96] At professional and public events hosted at Qajar monuments such as the Darolfonun School[97] and the Et-

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94   For instance, see: Beheshti Shirazi, *Revitalisation of Tehran, Reflections on the Quality Improvement of Historic Fabric*; Beheshti Shirazi, Najjar Najafi, and Abutorabian, *Sheikh-e Bahai va Toop-e Morvarid [Sheikh Baha'i and the Pearl Cannon]*; Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti Shirazi, 'Tafakor, Hoviyat, Madaniyat [Thought , Identity, Civilisation]', in *Atashgahi Dar Khab-e Atash-Ha [An Aperture To City Planning And Architecture In Iran, A Centennial Experience]*, ed. Ali A. Kiafar (Mashhad: Kasra, 2018), 126–56. The topic was also addressed in depth by Beheshti and Mohit-Tabatabai at 'Darolfonun, an unfulfilled dream', an event held in Tehran in January 2020 at Naqsh-e Jahan Art Research Center of ICOMOS in Tehran.

95   Mohsen Habibi, *Az Shar Ta Shahr [De La Cite a La Ville]* (Tehran: University of Tehran, 1996); Seyyed Mohsen Habibi, 'Shahr, Shahriyat, Shahrsazi Dar Iran [City, Urbanity, Urban Planning in Iran]', in *Atashgahi Dar Khab-e Atash-Ha [An Aperture To City Planning And Architecture In Iran, A Centennial Experience]* (Mashhad: Kasra, 2018), 279–316; Beheshti Shirazi, *Revitalisation of Tehran, Reflections on the Quality Improvement of Historic Fabric*; Hanachi, Diba, and Mahdavinejad, 'Hefazat va Tose'e Dar Iran [Conservation and Development in Iran]'; Sara Mahdizadeh and Pirooz Hanachi, 'The Role of Western Orientalists in Restoration of Historical Buildings during the Pahlavi Era, Iran (1925–1979)', *Honar-Ha-Ye-Ziba: Memary Va Shahrsazi* 21, no. 3 (2016): 5–14.

96   Iran, 'Qajariyeh Be Ravayat-e Tajrobeh/Maryam Farooqi Qajar, Naveh-Ye Ahmad Shah Qajar [Qajar by Experience/ Maryam Farooqi Qajar, Descendant of Ahmad Shah Qajar]', *Iran Newspaper*, 28 February 2019; Maryam Farouqi Qajar, 'Qajar Yek Khanevadeh Nist [Qajar Is Not a Family]', trans. Human Zalpour, *Iran Newspaper*, 24 February 2020.

97   Also mentioned by historians Farzaneh Ebrahimzadeh, who had already appeared as a speaker at events organized by the municipality, and Masud Tareh from the Centre for the Great Islamic Encyclopaedia (Centre for Iranian and Islamic Studies) at an event on 21 January 2020 on the history of education during the Qajar period at the Darolfonun school in Tehran.

tehadiyeh House,[98] Qajar history was mentioned together with the nostalgia of that period reflected in Ali Hatami's films and shows. [99] I could observe the same pattern on the margins of the official and unofficial realms where Tehran's Beautification Organization and the tourism sector interacted. On Instagram, at events such as 'Wednesdays of Tehran' and on city tours, the public was invited to view Tehran's Qajar legacy through a bias-free lens.

Figure 50: Posts of the official Instagram pages of the municipality and city council on reconstruction of demolished Qajar monuments

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98   'Examining the Historical and Social Development of Tehran House in Dr Mansoureh Ettehadiyeh's Research on Tehran', an event organized by the Tehran Beautification Organization on 9 February 2020 at Ettehadiyeh House (Tehran House).

99   Iranian film director and screenwriter, known for portraying the Qajar period and the Constitutional Revolution of Iran in films and shows such as 'Hajji Washington' (1982), 'Kamalolmolk' (1984), 'Love Stricken' (1992), and 'Hezar Dastan' (1978 to 1987). He was criticized for blending and sugarcoating the uncomfortable Qajar history with a nostalgic narrative. See: Ramin S Khanjani, *Animating Eroded Landscapes: The Cinema of Ali Hatami* (H&S Media, 2014).

Toopkhaneh Square

The reconstruction of Qajar monuments that were destroyed by the Pahlavis is a physical testament to the mentioned policy of sanctioned nostalgia. Some of the city council's proposals, such as the stylistic reconstruction of Takiyeh-Dolat,[100] have remained ideas, but others such as Darvazeh Ghar, one of Tehran's historic gates, have been implemented. The stylistic reconstruction of Baladiyeh, the Qajar municipality building, was the largest and most discussed project of its kind in the city centre. Initiated in 2015, the reconstruction project had been under consideration since the mid-2000s, involving actors from the city administration and universities. In 2016, the municipality and stakeholders from the tourism sector started to promote the project through social media and at public events such as 'Wednesdays of Tehran'.[101]

The project partners used place-making and urban design criteria to justify rebuilding the demolished Qajar building, which aimed at correcting the square's broken geometry. In an Instagram livestream with Zahedi (a filmmaker), for example, the mayor of District 12 said that Baladiyeh defines the boundaries of the square and exemplifies the historical foundations of Tehran's cultural and urban management. In a podcast interview, Mokhtari Taleghani, a former heritage official and current senior advisor to the municipality, echoed a similar viewpoint, contending that the square's geometry was disrupted as a consequence of the demolition of the Baladiyeh and Telegrafkhaneh buildings.[102] According to Mokhtari Taleghani, the Pahlavi government removed Qajar traces such as the gates in Toopkhaneh as part of its beautification programme. Arguing that the reconstruction of Baladiyeh would correct the geometric structure of the square, he suggested that the

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100   The Takiyeh-Dolat complex in Qajar Tehran was constructed in the mid-19th century as a place of mourning during the month of Muharram, which commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the third Shia Imam.

101   The 16th meeting, on 2 October 2019.

102   Ramyar Manouchehrzaseh and Negin Firoozi, 'Meidan-e Toopkhaneh', Radio Nist, accessed 10 April 2022, http://radionist.com/podcasts/ep28-meydantoop khaneh/.

Qajar Telegrafkhaneh should eventually be rebuilt to replace the existing telecommunications building, which dates back to the early 1970s.

Despite being produced by an independent cultural institute, the podcast adhered to the typical reformist approach to urban heritage. It incorporated interviews from various sources, including municipality advisors, the commissioned planning engineers, as well as academics, Tehran researchers, and social media influencers. The podcast also blended official and unofficial narratives of Tehran's heritage. On the one hand, it featured politically approved accounts of historical events, including the execution of Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri,[103] the demonstrations that sparked the 1979 Revolution, and the terrorist attack in Toopkaneh committed by the Mojahedin-e Khalgh in the early 1980s. On the other hand, memories of the period before the 1979 Revolution were also subtly brought up, with extracts from Radio Iran broadcasts, such as the patriotic song 'Ey Iran', being played in the background. [104]

Similarly, in a *Bukhara*-organized event[105] about Toopkhaneh, Hanachi referred to the documents published by MRUD, according to which Reza Shah intentionally removed reminders of the Qajars from the area. [106] By asking: "Which historical layer is authentic in terms of conservation?", he repeated a question that had already been discussed at the conservation programme of the University of Tehran about a

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103   Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri (1843–1909), Shia cleric and political leader in the late Qajar period, was a supporter of the Constitution and at the same time an opponent of secularization and modernization.

104   'O Iran' is a song composed by Ruhollah Khaleqi to lyrics by Hossein Gol-e-Golab after the invasion of Iran in World War II. It was first performed by Gholamhossein Banan in 1944 and was used as the opening song for Radio Tehran's morning broadcasts for decades. See: Morteza Hoseyni Dehkordi and Parvin Loloi, 'EY IRĀN', in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 2000.

105   'Bukhara Evenings' [*Shab-ha-ye Bukhara*], a regular event organized by the *Bukhara* magazine edited by Ali Dehbashi. The event on Toopkhaneh was held on 3 January 2016. Pirooz Hanachi former Deputy MRUD and Mayor of Tehran was one of the speakers.

106   Farokh Mohammadzadeh Mehr and MRUD, *Meidan-e Toopkhaneh-Ye Tehran [Toopkhaneh Square of Tehran]* (Tehran: Payam-e Sima, 2003).

decade earlier.[107] The Baladiyeh project gives a straightforward answer to that question. It seems that the zero hour of Toopkhaneh, according to those involved, was the moment of the demolition of Baladiyeh by the modernist Pahlavi government. Therefore, the authentic historical layer Hanachi was looking for is where the Islamic Republic rebuilds what the Pahlavi administration destroyed.

The project partners' additional ideas, such as the provision of public space, a hall for public discussions on urban issues, as well as a theatre and entertainment centre, mirror other reconstruction projects planned by the municipality, such as the House of Tehran. According to the project's consultant, the building would be an entertainment centre and a dialogue house for the citizens of Tehran to participate in urban governance affairs.[108] A former member of the city council expressed concern about the possible shift in decisions by the new city administration, which could compromise the guarantee of public access to the building.[109] Projects such as the Urban Dialogue House and the House of Tehran, that failed to engage the general public give a clear indication of the fate of the Baladiyeh project. I also observed the trajectory of Ettehadiyeh House, also known as the House of Tehran, as it underwent a series of transformations in terms of reuse concepts and name changes during the transition from a conservative to a reformist government and then back to a conservative one.[110] However, despite these extensive changes, the successive transformations ultimately fell short of their commitments to establish an inclusive "house for the people of Tehran"

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107   Based on the memories of the author, who was a student of Hanachi at the University of Tehran in the mid-2000s.

108   Manouchehrzaseh and Firoozi, 'Meidan-e Toopkhaneh'.

109   IRNA, 'Negarini-Ye Yek Ozv-e Shora-Ye Shahr-e Tehran Az Enheraf Dar Bahrebardir-Ye "Khane Shahr" [A Member Of The Tehran City Council Is Concerned About The Inappropriate Exploitation Of The "City House"]', *IRNA*, accessed 14 October 2022, https://irna.ir/xjBKWb.

110   Solmaz Yadollahi, 'When Values-Based Conservation Theory Meets Planning Practice in Tehran', in *Conservation Theory and the Urban Realpolitik*, ed. Solmaz Yadollahi, vol. 10, Kulturelle Und Technische Werte Historischer Bauten (Berlin: Birkhäuser, 2024).

or a museum that could effectively compete with international counterparts. It is also worth noting that although the Baladiyeh project aimed to provide the city centre with a theatre and cinema, about 500 metres away, on Lalehzar Street, there are some 18 abandoned historic cinemas and theatre halls that urgently need to be preserved and reused.

Figure 51: Poster of a 'Bukhara Evenings' event about Toopkhaneh Square with the picture of the demolished Telegraph Building (Telegrafkhaneh)
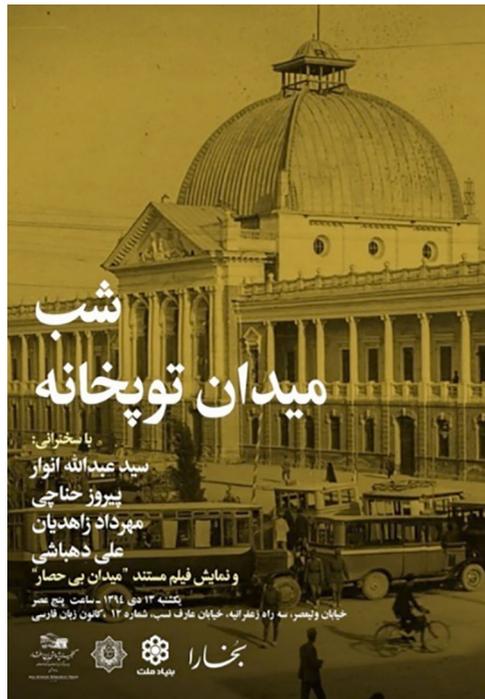
© bukharamag.com

Figure 52: The Municipality of Tehran (Baladiyeh) in 1930s[111]

Figure 53: The ongoing reconstruction project of the Baladiyeh

Author, 2022

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111   Mostafa   Kiani,   *Memari-Ye Doreh-Ye Pahlavi-Ye Aval [Architecture During the 1st Pahalavi Dinesty]* (Tehran: Research Institute for Contemporary History of Iran, 2004), 292.

Lalehzar Street

The Qajar-era tulip garden (Lalehzar) became Tehran's—and perhaps even Iran's—gateway to Westernized "high culture and art" in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[112] With the post-World War II social and political changes in Tehran, the gentrified ambience of Lalehzar Street gradually transformed into a centre for popular entertainment, with several cinemas, hotels, and cabarets offering song and dance, and alcohol.[113] Hung at the entrance of the Hedayat Mosque in the neighbourhood, Ayatollah Taleghani's famous saying—"The trade in unbelief and faith is not without customers, some like this, others that"[114]—described the rather tolerant pre-Revolutionary coexistence of ideologies in the area.

After the 1979 Revolution, all the cabarets and bars, most of the cinemas and some theatres were burnt down or vandalized and the street was gradually handed over to the wholesale electrical appliances and retail guild.[115] With the guild settling in the area, the socio-spatial dynamics in Lalehzar developed in a way similar to those around the Grand Bazaar. Today, the inner parts of the neighbourhood serve as warehouses and workshops for the electrical appliance shops and the textile and fabric businesses located, for example, in the Plasco Tower near Lalehzar.

As of the mid-1990s, the municipality looked into Lalehzar's physical and socio-economic potential for history-oriented beautification, as well as the development of a tourist pedestrian axis. [116] As with other

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112   Jane Lewisohn, 'The Rise and Fall of Lalehzar, Cultural Centre of Tehran in the Mid-Twentieth Century' (Music Department, SOAS, University of London, 2015).

113   Ibid.

114   'Ayatollah Taleghani Cheguneh Rah-E Behesht Ra Hamvar Mikard? [How Did Ayatollah Taleghani Pave The Way To Heaven?]', *Political Studies and Research Institute*, 6 September 2014, https://psri.ir/?id=q5ol1zfj.

115   Lewisohn, 'The Rise and Fall of Lalehzar, Cultural Centre of Tehran in the Mid-Twentieth Century'.

116   Safamanesh & Co. Engineers, 'Tarh-e Behsazi va Bazsazi-Ye Khiaban-e Lalehzar [Improvement and Reconstruction Plan for Lalehzar Street]' (Tehran Beautification Organization, 1994); Bavand Consulting Engineers, 'The Detailed Plan of Tehran's 12th District'; Rahvan Shahr Consultant Engineers, 'Sanad-e Jame' Mo-

projects, such as Toopkhaneh Square, the period between the late Qajar Constitutional Revolution and the August 1953 coup were considered of historical significance, bringing the Revolutionary and anti-American story of Lalehzar to the fore.[117] At the height of the CIA-organized coup, places like Toopkhaneh and Lalehzar witnessed a political turning point in the development of democracy in Iran; this was also when the intellectual atmosphere of Lalehzar, which was influenced by the Iranian Left Party, began to decline.[118] Lalehzar's political background—associated with the 1905 Constitutional Revolution and the 1953 coup—has been highlighted in post-Revolutionary films and television series,[119] the most famous of which are Ali Hatami's works produced in the Ghazali Cinema Town created by Hatami (Figure 54).

     Given its multi-layered and controversial past, the revitalization of Lalehzar has been a contentious subject in Tehran's public sphere. For instance, in a panel discussion entitled 'Revitalising Lalehzar: Bowing to which Past?' participants expressed scepticism about revitalizing the 'maligned' neighbourhood into a cultural centre or converting a profane space into a sacred one.[120]

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diriyat va Hefazat-e Baft-Ha va Bana-Ha-Ye Tarikhiy-e Tehran [The Comprehensive Document for the Management and Conservation of the Historic Buildings and Urban Fabric of Tehran]' (Tehran: Municipality of Tehran, 2012), Research and Planning Centre of Municipality of Tehran.

117   The coup was planned by the CIA and the British Secret Intelligence Service. See: Donald Newton Wilber, *Regime Change in Iran: Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran, November 1952-August 1953* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 2006).

118   Lewisohn, 'The Rise and Fall of Lalehzar, Cultural Centre of Tehran in the Mid-Twentieth Century'; Wilber, *Regime Change in Iran: Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran, November 1952-August 1953*.

119   A popular example was the historical drama series 'Shahrzad', directed by Hassan Fathi and released on the Household Entertainment Network in 2015.

120   Speakers of the discussion panel were Zahra Nejad-Baharam (former member of the city council), Ruhollah Nosrati (sociologist from University of Tehran) and Mohammad Atashinbar (from the Nazar Research Center for Art, Architecture & Urbanism). See: Nazar Research Center for Art, Architecture & Urbanism, 'Ruykard-e Ejtemai Lazemeh-Ye Ehya-Ye Khiaban-e Lalehzar [Social Approach as a

Yet, looking at social media and less formal public events about the neighbourhood, one sees all kinds of statements referring to the various past faces of the street. People rave about the lost public spaces such as the Grand Hotel, the theatre halls, cinemas, and luxury fashion shops, but also about the cabarets that staged music and dance and served alcohol. At the first public screening of the film 'Zemestanast' about Lalehzar at the Tehran House of Cinema, I witnessed an instance of the juxtaposition of narratives about the street's past. Upon a scene with a background song by Lalehzar singer Susan, the audience began to clap softly. The hushed clapping seemed to me an expression of taboo nostalgia straining to come out in the open. It revealed that, in the actual assemblage of urban heritage in everyday life, official and non-official narratives remain interwoven with the city. In the public sphere of Tehran, Ali Hatami's political narrative of Lalehzar is as present as ordinary people's memories of oriental dancers and singers in the cabarets of Lalehzar. Moreover, my online and offline ethnographic research confirms that the street has been strongly coded according to its current function in everyday urban life. Most Tehranis immediately associate the name Lalehzar with lamps, cables, and chandeliers.

Prerequisite for the Revitalisation of Lalehzar Street]', *Nazar-Online*, 22 October 2019.

Figure 54: Ghazali Cinema Town, today a Tehran tourist attraction

Author, 2022

Figure 55: A scene featuring Lalehzar from the 'Hezar-dastan' series filmed in the Ghazali Cinema Town [121]

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121   Mohsen Azarm, 'Shahr-e Farang-e Ali Hatami', *Angah Magazine*, 2020, 43.

Figure 56: A scene from the 'Shahrzad' series featuring the 1953 events in Lalehzar

© shahrzadseries.com

Beautification and place-making in Lalehzar have been much more complicated than the other examples reviewed due to the intertwined ideological and economic conflicts over public space.[122] As mentioned earlier, there were concerns that the beautification of the street would be construed as sympathy for its entertainment-related past. This ideological position has arguably become instrumental in maintaining the existing economic-spatial order in Lalehzar. After all, turning the neighbourhood into a cultural hub very much runs counter to the economic interests of the electrical appliances shops—a sector supported by the neighbourhood's powerful mosque.

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122   The main conflicts between stakeholders are mentioned in one of the municipality's recent reports on Lalehzar: Bod-e Puya Shahr Engineers, 'Project Report: Samandehi, Behsazi va Nosazi-e Khiaban-e Lalehzar (Had-e Fasel-e Khiaban-e Enghelab Ta Kiaban-e Jomhuri) [Improvement, Reconstruction and Renovation of Lalehzar Street (between Enghelab Street and Jomhuri Street)]' (Municipality of Tehran, Deputy for Urban Planning and Architecture, 2019).

Figure 57: Lalehzar Street in the 1960s[123]

At its core, the relationship between the guild and the mosque in Lalehzar retains the economic and cultural characteristics of the historical alliance between the bazaar and the mosque in Iran.[124] The shop owners, especially the older generation, still participate in the religious ceremonies of Ramazan and Muharram and engage in charity initiatives to strengthen their ties with each other and with the mosque. The informal cooperation between the guild and the Lalehzar mosque was also remarkable during the 2020 COVID-19 crisis. On several occasions during my fieldwork, I witnessed the Lalehzar mosque closely monitoring and critiquing cultural activities in places such as the House of Tehran and the activities of heritage campaigners such as the 'Friends of Lalehzar' group.[125] While the group and the city council members talked about

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123   Azadeh Moaveni, 'Iran and the US: When Friends Fall Out', *Middle East Eye*, 2022, https://www.middleeasteye.net/big-story/iran-us-uk-oil-friends-fall-ap art-cia-coup.

124   See: Ashraf, 'Bazaar-Mosque Alliance: The Social Basis of Revolts and Revolutions'.

125   A group of senior and junior architects and planners, artists, journalists, and students led by urban planner Zahra Taraneh Yalda. The group, which worked informally until 2022, was registered as a Community Based Organisation at the municipality's headquarters for the Empowerment of Non-governmental Organizations.

Lalehzar as a pedestrian zone, the guild continued to use the pavements as regular parking for goods transport and motorbikes that are the most convenient vehicles in the busy inner city. And while the campaigners spoke of future cafes and active cinemas and theatres and more residential areas in the neighbourhood, the guild kept using historic theatres and cinemas and houses as warehouses and workshops. In addition, the variety of ownership types (public,[126] private, and Awqaf), sometimes in the same building, could make changing the status quo in the area extremely complicated.

More recently, cinema owners have attempted to convert their properties into commercial buildings. Even after the reopening of some cultural centres in the 1980s, some cinemas and theatres of Lalehzar remained closed due to the post-Revolutionary cultural policies and the development of online media and streaming services that affected the general cinema sector. Several cinemas in Lalehzar have thus been inactive since the 1990s.

One of the oldest cinemas in the country, Cinema Iran,[127] is a widely debated case in which the owner successfully challenged the heritage protection laws in the Administrative Court of Justice.[128] With the approval of the Ministry of Islamic Guidance and the MRUD[129] to alter the registered use classification of the cinema and the defeat of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage in court, a demolition order was issued in 2020. When the court's decision was published in the media in April 2021, a campaign was launched, addressed to the Minister of Cultural Heritage, to prevent the destruction by listing the cinema. Arguing that the demolition of Cinema Iran would have a domino effect that would threaten

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126   After the Revolution, several cinemas, theatres, and cabarets were confiscated by parastatal organizations.

127   At its present location, the cinema dates back to the 1930s.

128   For more detailed information about the role of the Administrative Court of Justice see the section on: Political reform: Territorializing heritage between two identity discourses.

129   The Article Five Commission of the HCAUP is the legal body responsible for issuing such permits.

other cinemas of Lalehzar,[130] members of the city council called on the Ministry of Cultural Heritage to list all 18 of the historic cinemas in the area.[131] However, once the reformist city councillors as well as the Minister of Cultural Heritage were out of office in August 2021, media attention for the campaign drastically decreased. At the time of writing, the owner's conflict with heritage activists and heritage authorities is ongoing.

Despite the controversy, the city administration beautified and pedestrianized the northern section of the street in the spring of 2020 and promised free parking space for motorbikes. Unsurprisingly, the beautified pedestrian walkways were immediately claimed by motorbikes. In November 2021, a member of the newly elected city council posted a monitoring report on District 12, calling projects like Lalehzar "theories good for academic books" and "a disaster that has caused a great deal of trouble for the guild and its clients".[132] In response to the criticism, the former mayor of District 12 tagged the council in an Instagram post, arguing that the Lalehzar project was a long-term and social project.[133] For me, this dialogue was another bitter reminder of the short-term nature of Iranian reform, which sooner or later is thwarted by entrenched processes.

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130 Mojgan Ansari, 'Takhrib-e Cinema Iran-e Lalehzar, Shoru-e Takhrib-e Seriyali-e Cinema Ast [The Destruction Of Cinema Iran In Lalezar Signals The Beginning Of A Series Of Destructions Of Cinemas]', *ISNA*, 29 December 2020, isna.ir/xdHnbz.

131 Mehr News Agency, 'Darkhast-e E'ta Bara-Ye Sabt-e Meli-e Hamzaman-e 18 Cinema-Ye Lalehzar [E'ta's Request for Simultaneous National Registration of 18 Cinemas in Lalezar]' (Mehr News Agency, 1 May 2021), mehrnews.com/xTvqZ.

132 See @mozafar.meysam Instagram post on 28 November 2021, accessed on 29.3.2023.

133 See @amsaadati_official Instagram post on 30 November 2021, and [Stories Highlights: Lalehzar], accessed on 29.3.2023.

Figure 58: Cinema Iran

Author, 2022

Figure 59: An example of the beautified areas in Lalehzar

Author, 2022

Tehran's socio-spatial urban heritage assemblage

Reform-oriented players in Tehran advocated beautification and place-making projects and the creation of a network of pedestrian walkways linking tourist and cultural hubs in the city centre. These nodes include some 195 listed buildings spread across the area.[134] Some, such as the Mostofi-ol-mamalek House in Sangeladge and the Nasirol-molk House in Oudlajan, have been neglected due to lack of funding and irregular administration cycles. Nevertheless, some examples, such as the conversion of a historic house in Oudlajan into a cultural centre called Khaneh-ye Ordibehesht, show that the transfer of ownership to the private sector through the government's 'Build Operate Transfer' (BOT) programme has resulted in remarkable social and economic contributions to the neighbourhood.

An example of the municipality's attempt to include individual buildings to Tehran's urban heritage network is the museum-houses project. Tehran's museum-houses were established in under the national

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134   According to the records of the Cultural Heritage Organization of Tehran, 32 objects are located in District 11 and 163 objects in District 12.