

The second cycle: Re-assembling conservation and heritage planning

An overview of the political landscape in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution

In the wake of the 1979 Revolution, Iran found itself, for the second time in its contemporary history, as a 'Body Without Organs', which held countless possible socio-political constellations. However, it did not take long for the diverse social and political groups that had participated in and witnessed the event to realize that the Revolution was about to give rise to a new autocratic and theocratic structure with self-destructive tendencies.⁸² According to Deleuze and Guattari, such an assemblage can be described as a cancerous body that tends to deny any measure of difference and, by insisting on this tendency, gradually erodes its own organs and resources.⁸³

Following the establishment of the Islamic Republic, influential clergy and the political elite set up a political, economic, and military network that ran independently of and in parallel to official governmental bodies.⁸⁴ Key players in this network included para-governmental foundations (*bonyads*),⁸⁵ which confiscated properties belonging to the former monarchy as well as numerous public and private buildings.⁸⁶

82 See: Tehranian, 'Communication and Revolution in Iran: The Passing of a Paradigm'; Ali Assadi and Majid Tehranian, *Sedai Ke Shanide Nashod [The Voice That Was Not Heard]* (Tehran: Nashr-e Nei, 2016).

83 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

84 Ali A. Saeidi, 'The Accountability of Para-Governmental Organizations (Bonyads): The Case of Iranian Foundations', *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 3 (1 September 2004): 479–98, doi:10.1080/0021086042000287541; Kazem Alamdari, 'The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Transition from Populism to Clientelism, and Militarization of the Government', *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 8 (1 November 2005): 1285–1301, doi:10.1080/01436590500336690.

85 Saeidi, 'The Accountability of Para-Governmental Organizations (Bonyads): The Case of Iranian Foundations'.

86 It is nevertheless worth noting that a number of such estates were later used as cultural centres. See for instance: Eskandar Mokhtari Taleghani et al., *Khia-*

They played a key role in the de-territorialization of heritage planning and conservation through their administration of the Awqaf Organization, which was in charge of several religious and non-religious historical properties.⁸⁷

Meanwhile, the war with Iraq and the economic sanctions that began in the 1980s isolated the country economically and politically. In the post-war period and after the passing of the Islamic Republic's charismatic leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, the Islamic Revolutionary network fragmented into multiple power centres that competed not only against each other, but also against official government entities.⁸⁸ While these political factions—of informal and formal networks of individuals, groups, and organizations—were loyal to the state as a whole, they had conflicting interests as well as their own economic and cultural agendas.⁸⁹ Operating without a political mandate, these diverse factions have been highly influential in preventing meaningful reform in the Islamic Republic.⁹⁰

The multicentric nature of political forces in Iran continued to affect the cultural and economic aspects of conservation and urban heritage planning. The conflict between the political groups intensified after Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's⁹¹ attempts at economic decentralization in the 1990s. In response, Islamic Revolutionary networks

ban-e Vali-e Asr Miras-e Memari va Shahrsazi-Ye Tehran [Vali E Asr Avenue Tehran's Architectural and Urban Heritage], 2nd ed. (Tehran: Tehran Beautification Organisation, 2019).

87 Alamdari, 'The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Transition from Populism to Clientelism, and Militarization of the Government'.

88 Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2000); Alamdari, 'The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Transition from Populism to Clientelism, and Militarization of the Government'.

89 Eva Rakel, *Power, Islam, and Political Elite in Iran: A Study on the Iranian Political Elite from Khomeini to Ahmadinejad* (Brill, 2008).

90 Ibid.

91 The fourth president of Iran (1989–1997).

redirected the privatization of state-owned enterprises from the private sector to parastatal organizations and other politically influential actors⁹²—in an unequal competition with private investors, these became to a large extent the new private sector. During Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's administration, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as a key parastatal organ, gained enormous power in the economic and political spheres of Iranian society.

Key political scholars also pointed out that the multiplicity of competing formal and informal power centres was the main cause of the incoherence of the post-Revolution Iranian governmental policies.⁹³ These contradictions emerged and were exacerbated throughout reform-oriented administrations. As we will explore in the upcoming sections, as reformists implemented legal and parliamentary changes to the political system, the Revolutionary network worked in parallel to render their legal mechanisms ineffective. This clash was evident, for instance, in the conflicting dynamics between the tourism and World Heritage policies of the Islamic Republic and its Isolationist measures for national and regional security.

The limitations of the official legal system and elected political organs in the context of Iran's post-1979 political structure was reflected in the weakened impact of the conservation policies that were developed at the time. Mired by a lack of independent and critical academia and autonomous civil society, as well as corrupt administrative practices, the era saw the proliferation of contradictory and short-term cultural and urban planning policies.

92 Saeidi, 'The Accountability of Para-Governmental Organizations (Bonyads): The Case of Iranian Foundations'.

93 For instance, Alamdari, 'The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Transition from Populism to Clientelism, and Militarization of the Government'; Saeidi, 'The Accountability of Para-Governmental Organizations (Bonyads): The Case of Iranian Foundations'.

Re-territorializing conservation along the lines of Revolutionary ideological codes

The decade following the 1979 Revolution witnessed the dismantling of the legal and administrative structures that sustained order in urban planning and the conservation of cultural heritage. This was reflected for instance in the unregulated housing actions taken by the Revolutionary para-governmental organizations to bring about social justice⁹⁴ and also in the attacks by extremists on historic sites that were considered symbols of the *taghut*⁹⁵ and the fallen monarchy.⁹⁶ Although the interim government prevented major destruction,⁹⁷ media reports,⁹⁸ as well as legislation enacted in the early 1980s⁹⁹ reflect the government's con-

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- 94 This was primarily accomplished by assigning seized assets to the poor. In Tehran alone, approximately 10 million square metres of urban land, located both within the city and its protected zones, were transferred to landless families through a combination of spontaneous seizures and Revolutionary court decisions. See: Ramin Keivani, Michael Mattingly, and Hamid Majedi, 'Public Management of Urban Land, Enabling Markets and Low-Income Housing Provision: The Overlooked Experience of Iran', *Urban Studies* 45, no. 9 (2008): 1825–53.
- 95 A Quranic word referring to the disbeliever and oppressive rulers.
- 96 Mehdi Hodjat, 'Cultural Heritage in Iran: Policies for an Islamic Country' (Doctoral thesis, University of York, 1995), <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/2460/1/DX193597.pdf>; Shahrzad Shirvani, 'Making Histories of "Sacred" Mausoleums', *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 29, no. 2 (2018): 55–71.
- 97 Eskandar Deldam, 'Khaterati az Shaykh Sadegh Khalkhali Givi, bakhsh Dovom [Memories from Shaykh Sadegh Khalkhali Givi, Part Two]', 14 August 2017, sh-orturl.at/kmxzG.
- 98 Gholamreza Masoumi, 'Takhrib-e Athar-e Farhangi Tarfand-e Doshmanan-e Enghelab [Destruction of Cultural Properties, a Strategy of the Revolution's Enemies]', *Jomhuri-e Eslami*, 16 January 1982, sec. Farhangi-Honari; 'Gohar-hai Ke Khak Shodand: Masjed-e Mirza Jafar-Mashhad [Jems that turned into Soil: the destruction of Mirza Jafar Mosque-Mashhad]', *Athar* 1, no. 1 (1980): 123–31.
- 99 Parliament of Iran, 'The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran, Article 83' (The Official Magazine: Rooznameh-e Rasmi-e Keshvar, 1979); The Council of the Islamic Revolution, 'Layehey-e Ghanouni-e Raj'e Be Kakhhay-e Niavaran va Saadabad va Nahvey-e Arzyabi va Negahdari-e Amval-e Marboot [The Legal Bill on

cern¹⁰⁰ about ideologically motivated vandalism and the fate of cultural properties confiscated by the *bonyads*.

In June 1982, a UNESCO delegation visited Iran to observe the condition of heritage sites and palaces. Despite the aforementioned domestic concerns, the official journal of NOPHM, *Athar*, wrote: Being convinced that all the news about the destruction of cultural heritage was false, the UNESCO representative committee left Iran with the absolute certainty that Iran's cultural heritage was not in danger.¹⁰¹ While the national authorities were aware of the real issues and discussed them in Farsi language newspapers, they preferred to keep domestic problems under wraps from outsiders, in this case, the UNESCO representatives. This institutional tendency is reflected in Herzfeld's theoretical framework of 'cultural intimacy',¹⁰² a concept that helps explain the behaviour of the authorities in response to various cases of heritage journalism and activism that are discussed in Part Two.

Territorializing conservation in the Islamic Republic faced ideological challenges particularly following the Islamization of the Constitution, which led to the explicit protection of private property rights.¹⁰³ Islamic sharia generally advocates for private property rights and requires the state to allow owners to make optimal use of their property. The Iranian clergy has thus historically opposed urban modernization

Niavaran and Saadabad Palaces and The Evaluation and Maintenance of These Properties]; 1980.

- 100 Article 83 of the Islamic Republic's Constitution mentions the term, 'irreplaceable treasures', referring to properties and objects of national heritage significance that cannot be transferred to the private sector except with the approval of the Islamic Consultative Assembly. The term and the corresponding law later came into conflict with the privatization policies enacted in the mid-1990s.
- 101 'Mamuriyat-e UNESCO Dar Iran, Kholaseh-Ye Gozash-e Bazdid Konandegan-e UNESCO Az Iran [UNESCO's Mission in Iran, a Summary of the UNESCO Visitors' Report]', *Athar* 3, no. 7–9 (1983): 291–96.
- 102 Michael Herzfeld, 'The European Crisis and Cultural Intimacy', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 13, no. 3 (2013): 491–97; Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics and the Real Life of States, Societies, and Institutions* (Routledge, 2016).
- 103 Parliament of Iran, 'The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran' (The Official Magazine: Rooznameh-e Rasmi-e Keshvar, 1979).

policies on the grounds that they interfere with owners' control over their private property.¹⁰⁴ Urban development was to an extent justified on the basis of greater public benefit and social justice,¹⁰⁵ but this attitude did not extend to conservation of cultural heritage. As Mehdi Hodjat, a supervisor of cultural heritage affairs in the interim government and the first director of the later established Cultural Heritage Organization wrote,¹⁰⁶ in the early 1980s, several owners of historic places submitted a complaint to the Guardian Council¹⁰⁷ against the Antiquities Law, which they believed violated their rights to alter or re-develop their properties.¹⁰⁸ The Council decided that some provisions of the Antiquities Law violated sharia law. Consequently, despite cultural heritage conservation continuing to be included in the official policy of the Islamic Republic, the post-Revolutionary legal and administrative system for conservation could face challenges, such as when engaging in negotiations with para-governmental organizations like the Awqaf Organization or regular private owners.

104 Mehran Tamadonfar, 'Islam, Law, and Political Control in Contemporary Iran', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, no. 2 (2001): 205–20.

105 For instance see S. Mohammad Beheshti's articles on public ownership in Islam: S. Mohammad Beheshti, 'Malekiyat Dar Eslam (2) [Ownership in Islam (2)]', *Pasdar-e Eslam*, no. 2 (1982): 24–26; S. Mohammad Beheshti, 'Malekiyat Dar Eslam (3) [Ownership in Islam (3)]', *Pasdar-e Eslam*, no. 3 (1982): 28–29. Also see: Tamadonfar, 'Islam, Law, and Political Control in Contemporary Iran'.

106 *Mirath-e Farhangi Dar Iran: Syasat Ha Baray-e Yek Keshvar-e Eslami [Cultural Heritage in Iran, Policies for an Islamic Country]* (Tehran: ICHO, 2001).

107 The Council of 12 Jurists of Islamic law is authorized by the Supreme Leader to monitor the legislation of the Parliament and presidential elections.

108 Such court cases resulting in the delisting of historic buildings decreased in the 1990s, but became more common again in the mid-2000s.

Figure 13: Iraqi war prisoners forming a choral group at Tehran's Evin Prison, performing on a stage that features the monarchy's downfall and the collapse of the pillars of the pre-Islamic historical site, Persepolis



© Jean Gaumy/Magnum Photos, 1986.¹⁰⁹

Following the reinstatement of the Awqaf trustees in April 1979¹¹⁰ and the 1984 Awqaf Law,¹¹¹ the clergy gained more autonomy in managing the Awqaf. Endowment affairs, which were under the prime minister's authority before the Revolution, were transferred to the Awqaf organization, supervised by the Supreme Leader's representatives. The redevelopment of religious sites and other Awqaf properties in cities like Mash-

109 Image used with permission. Copyright [1986]. All rights reserved.

110 Premiership of Iran, 'Layehe-Ye Ghanooni Tajdid-e Gharadad va Ejareh-Ye Am-lak va Amvale Mowqufeh va Tajdid-e Entekhab-e Motevalian va Omana Ava No-zar-e Amaken-e Motebarekeh Mazhabi va Masajed [The Bill on the Renewal of the Leasing Contract for Endowment Properties and the Re-Appointment of Ad-ministrators of Mosques and Religious Places]' (1979).

111 Parliament of Iran, 'Chanoun-e Tashkilat va Ekhtiarat-e Sazman-e Awqaf va Omour-e Kheiriyeh [Law of the Establishment of Awqaf Organization]' (The Of-ficial Magazine: Rooznameh-e Rasmi-e Keshvar, 1984).

had was a political issue well before the 1979 Revolution.¹¹² With the Revolution and the new political and executive power of the clergy, the redevelopment of religious sites came to be presented as a political necessity to facilitate public prayers that symbolized the glory and popularity of the Islamic Republic.¹¹³

The story of the Imam Khomeini Musalla¹¹⁴ in Tabriz illustrates this political controversy. In the 1980s, Imam Jum'a of Tabriz¹¹⁵ wrote a book justifying the construction of a *musalla* on the archaeological site and listed the Ilkhanid mosque (Arg-e Alishah),¹¹⁶ to reuse and revive the ancient mosque. Calling the conservation authorities “ruin-dwelling and ruin-loving owls”,¹¹⁷ he warned them of “disgrace in this world and a mighty punishment in the afterlife”.¹¹⁸ Although the *musalla* was not built according to its initial idealistic plan, which was inspired by the Islamic Republic's emblem (Figure 14), it was eventually built next to the Arg and on top of the archaeological site (Figure 15).¹¹⁹

NOPHM's journal, *Athar*, published a report in 1980 on the seminar 'Archaeology in Harmony with the Revolution'.¹²⁰ In their coverage of the event, the press emphasized the clear departure from the pre-Revolutionary approach to archaeology and cultural heritage, while embracing a fresh perspective rooted in the principles of the 1979 Revolution and

112 See, for instance, the section: Debating urban heritage planning within the framework of urban renewal.

113 For instance see: Moslem Malakouti, *Masjed Masjed Shod [The Mosque Became a Mosque]*, first, vol. 1–2 (Tehran: Shafagh, 1985).

114 *Musalla* is an Arabic word that refers to a typically large area used for congregational prayer, especially at outdoor gatherings or religious events.

115 Malakouti, *Masjed Masjed Shod [The Mosque Became a Mosque]*.

116 Keramatollah Afsar, 'Arg-e 'Ališāh', in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 1986, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/arg-e-alisah-remains-of-a-colossal-mosque-built-in-tabriz-completed-1322>.

117 *Masjed Masjed Shod [The Mosque Became a Mosque]*, 1–2:588.

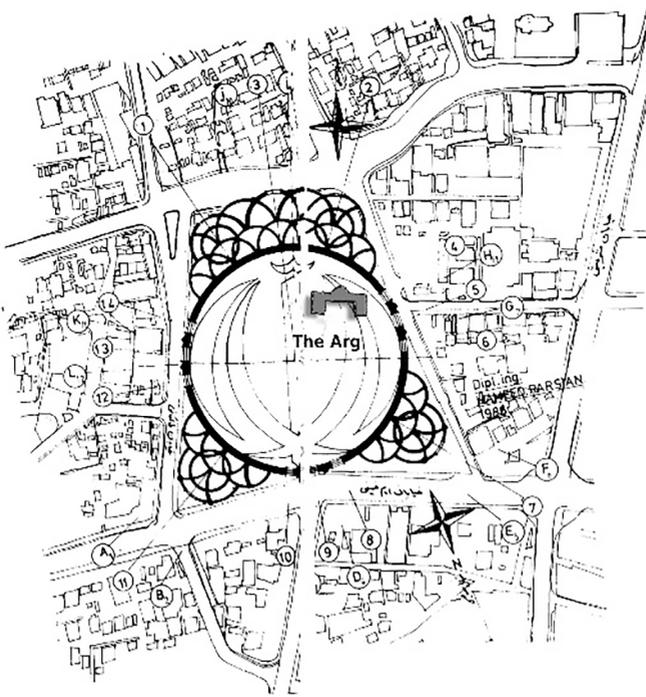
118 *Ibid.*, 1–2:3.

119 'Gocaman Tabriz 6: Interview with Mr Akbar Taghizadeh', 2018, shorturl.at/los16.

120 'Seminar-e Bastanshenasi Dar Rasta-Ye Enghelab [Seminar on Archaeology in Line with the Revolution]', *Athar* 2–4, no. 1 (1980): 246–48.

Islam. Over time, however, it became evident that the cultural heritage administrative and academic system had to maintain its dependence on the material and discursive frameworks established during the pre-Revolutionary period.

Figure 14: The initial plan proposed for the musalla was inspired by the Islamic Republic's emblem and covered the historical Arg under its gigantic dome.¹²¹



121 Malakouti, *Masjed Masjed Shod [The Mosque Became a Mosque]*, 1–2:705–6.

Figure 15: The 'Hello Commander' [Salam Farmandeh] chant¹²² at the gathering ceremony near the Imam Khomeini Musalla and in front of the Arg, Tabriz August 2022



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Purge committees set up within governmental organizations,¹²³ and the Cultural Revolution Bureau¹²⁴ set up within academic institutions began weeding out staff, professors, and students considered counter-Revolutionary.¹²⁵ Farabi University in Isfahan, which had launched a

122 A political and ideological song written for the Islamic Republic's younger generations.

123 See: Hooshang Kuklan, 'The Administrative System in the Islamic Republic of Iran: New Trends and Directions', *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 47, no. 3 (1981): 218–24.

124 The Cultural Revolution refers to a series of policies and actions carried out by the government of Iran, under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who was the Supreme Leader of Iran at that time. It was a project aimed to Islamize Iran's higher education systems. Its Bureau supervised the purging of disloyal students and professors and monitored the ideological environment of universities. See: Saeid Golkar, 'Cultural Engineering Under Authoritarian Regimes: Islamization of Universities in Postrevolutionary Iran', *Digest of Middle East Studies* 21, no. 1 (1 March 2012): 1–23, doi:10.1111/j.1949-3606.2012.00124.x.

125 Ibid.

conservation programme in the late 1970s, was among some 55 higher education institutions that were merged into larger universities.¹²⁶ Consequently, the conservation programme in Isfahan that was associated with NOPHM was temporarily suspended until it resumed accepting students in 1983.

Like other public institutions, the Ministry of Culture and Art, NOPHM, and universities in Tehran and Isfahan gradually purged disloyal individuals. The Cultural Revolution caused devastating damage to the country's intellectual resources across many academic fields.¹²⁷ My respondents¹²⁸ and other senior members of the conservation community¹²⁹ who recall the systematic purges of the 1980s in the academic and administrative sectors of conservation believe that the firing of academics and professionals and favouring loyalty over merit caused irreversible damage to the sector. It is also worth noting that the post-Revolution political atmosphere and the Iran-Iraq War that commenced in 1980 led to an unprecedented wave of migration and brain drain from Iran to the United States and Europe.¹³⁰

As *Athar* reported in the early 1980s, conservation activities generally declined due to the instability caused by the Revolution, cooperation among universities ceased due to their closure (following the Cul-

126 Farasatkah, *The Adventure of University in Iran*.

127 Ibid.; Shahrzad Mojab, *The State and University: The "Islamic Cultural Revolution" in the Institutions of Higher Education of Iran, 1980–1987* (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1991); LZ Levers, 'Ideology and Change in Iranian Education', *Education in the Muslim World: Different Perspectives*, 2006, 149–90.

128 Anonymous interviews on 9.1.2020 in Tehran and on 19.4.2021 via Skype.

129 See Gocaman Tabriz 6: Interview with Mr Akbar Taghizadeh (in Turkish).

130 Akbar E. Torbat, 'The Brain Drain from Iran to the United States', *Middle East Journal* 56, no. 2 (2002): 272–95; Pooya Azadi, Matin Mirramezani, and Mohsen B Mesgaran, 'Migration and Brain Drain from Iran', *Stanford Iran* 2040 (2020): 1–30.

tural Revolution), and international cooperation ended due to political and economic difficulties.¹³¹

Conservation under Revolutionary austerity

The 1980s were marked by the war with Iraq and the United States' sanctions against Iran. Archival data from this period show no major preservation projects in historic cities and no significant scientific undertakings. However, the institutional and academic elements remaining from the past rallied to build new structures. By the mid-1980s, the government succeeded in bringing the chaotic post-Revolutionary period under control and gradually subordinating the concerns of cultural heritage into the emerging legal and administrative order.

Following the dissolution of the Ministry of Culture and Art in 1980, NOPHM and cultural heritage affairs were placed under the supervision of the newly established Ministry of Culture and Higher Education and the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. This reflected the new heritage planning bureaucrats who viewed cultural heritage as intricately linked to education and research and believed that aligning it with Islamic values was of utmost importance.¹³²

Many state organizations, such as the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization (ICHO), were established or began operating in 1985.¹³³ In those years, pre-Revolution plans for historic neighbourhoods in cities

131 Athar, 'Fa'aliyat-Ha-Ye Sazman: Kholaseh-Ye Gozaresh Sale 1358–1359 [Activities of the Organisation: Report of the March 1979-March 1980]', *Athar* 2–4, no. 1 (1980): 185–89.

132 Mehdi Hodjat, the first Director of the Cultural Heritage Organization, provides an account of this process the rationale behind it. See: Hodjat, 'Cultural Heritage in Iran: Policies for an Islamic Country.'

133 Parliament of Iran, 'Ghanun-e Tashkil-e Sazman-e Miras-e Farhangi-e Keshvar [Law for the Establishment of the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organisation]' (The Official Magazine: *Rooznameh-e Rasmi-e Keshvar*, 1986); Parliament of Iran, 'Ghanun-e Asasnameh-Ye Sazman-e Miras-e Farhangi-e Keshvar [Law of the Statute of the ICHO]' (The Official Magazine: *Rooznameh-e Rasmi-e Keshvar*, 1986), Tehran.

such as Yazd,¹³⁴ Isfahan,¹³⁵ and Tehran¹³⁶ were revisited by the ICHO, and the Urban Rehabilitation Office¹³⁷ sought to establish ties with the municipalities. Parallel to this, a similar office for urban rehabilitation at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP), also established in 1985, continued the pre-Revolutionary urban renewal projects in the historic neighbourhoods.¹³⁸ Thus, both the conservation and urban renewal authorities picked up the former policies. Furthermore, in the face of population growth and the increasing migration of residents from war-torn areas to safer cities, the government had no choice but to invest in projects that would provide for urgent housing needs.

Despite the relative normalization of government affairs, the ownership and management of the irreplaceable treasures inherited from the fallen monarchy remained a problem in the mid-1980s.¹³⁹ As highlighted in the introduction of this chapter, a substantial quantity of public and private assets belonging to the previous state and individuals connected

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- 134 Mahmoud Tavassoli, 'Baft-e Ghadim, Moghadameh-i Bar Masaleh [The Historic City, an Introduction to the Issue]', in *Kholasehy-e Maghalat: Seminar-e Tadavome Hayat Dar Baftahay-e Ghadimi-e Shahrhay-e Iran [The Proceedings of the Seminar on the Continuation of Life in Iran's Historic Cities]* (Tehran: Iran University of Science and Technology, 1993), 5–15.
- 135 'Gozaresh-e Tarh-e Tajdid-e Nazar Dar Tarh-e Jame va Tafsili-e Esfahan [The Report on the Revision of Isfahan's Master and Detailed Plan]' (Housing and Urban Planning Organisation of Isfahan, 1988).
- 136 Bagher Ayatollah Zadeh Shirazi et al., 'Samandehi-e Bazaar-e Tehran [The Improvement of the Tehran Bazaar]', *Athar* 1, no. 2 (1980): 9–48; Bagher Ayatollah Zadeh Shirazi et al., 'Behsazi-e Mahaley-e Oudlajan [The Improvement of the Oudlajan Neighbourhood]', *Athar* 1, no. 2 (1980): 55–99.
- 137 Founded in 1987 by the ICHO.
- 138 For a detailed background of such projects see: Pirooz Hanachi, Darab Diba, and M. Javad Mahdavinjad, 'Hefazat va Tose'e Dar Iran [Conservation and Development in Iran]' 32 (2007): 51–60; Pirooz Hanachi et al., *Barresi-e Tatbighi-e Tajarob Maremat-e Shahri Dar Jahan va Iran, Ba Negahi Vijeh Be Baft-e Yazd [A Comparative Study Of Urban Preservation Experiences In The World And In Iran, With A Special Focus On The City Of Yazd]*, 1st ed. (Yazd: Sobhan Noor, 2007).
- 139 Parliament of Iran, 'Chanoon-e Mohasebat-e Omumi-e Keshvar [The Public Audit Act]' (The Official Magazine: Rooznameh-e Rasmi-e Keshvar, 1987).

to it were seized by the newly established state and parastatal organizations. This resulted in the unregulated exploitation of these assets, which included valuable cultural heritage properties. To regulate the sale and use of such historic properties, the Ministry of Economy and Finance issued an executive order under the Budget Law.¹⁴⁰ The legislation called for the establishment of a steering committee to identify properties of exceptional national value and prevent their privatization. Following the post-war privatization agenda in the 1990s and 2000s, the aforementioned legal instruments and the Steering Committee became the subject of controversy.

Conservation academia in the mid-1980s

With the reopening of universities in 1983, the de-Westernization of academic fields, especially the humanities, was initiated as a continuation of the policies of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁴¹ The University Crusade [*Jahad-e Daneshgahi*]¹⁴²—a body of Revolutionary academics—pushed the Islamization of universities by monitoring the academic environment and supporting research and scholarly publishing that reflected their agenda.¹⁴² Alongside university presses, the University Crusade formed their own press, which became a platform for academic publications that furthered Revolutionary values. The Annual University Admission [*Konkur*] also facilitated the Islamization and equalization of higher education by adjusting the academic, socio-economic, and political criteria for admission.¹⁴³

Textbooks and teaching content across subjects were also revised under the Cultural Revolution. In the field of conservation, the teaching materials of the 1980s advocated traditionalism, localism, and a

140 Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance, 'Ayin-Nameh-Ye Ejrai-e Tabsareh-Ye (35) Ghanoon-e Budjeh 1368 [Executive Regulations Note (35) of the Budget Law of 1989]', 1989.

141 Universities in Iran had been closed between 1980 and 1983.

142 Levers, 'Ideology and Change in Iranian Education'.

143 Keiko Sakurai, 'University Entrance Examination and the Making of an Islamic Society in Iran: A Study of the Post-Revolutionary Iranian Approach to "Konkur"', *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 3 (2004): 385–406.

postcolonial approach to culture, architecture, and urban planning.¹⁴⁴ One example of conservation teaching material is a syllabus¹⁴⁵ for the architectural conservation module at Shahid Beheshti University.¹⁴⁶ The syllabus encourages students to adopt a critical stance toward Western architectural and conservation theory while applying its practical techniques to promote Islamic values. By questioning "cultural tourism" and "historic landscapes", the syllabus criticizes the Western value system that favours the economic over the spiritual merit of cultural heritage. The text also criticizes Western "bureaucratic management" and "systematic planning", and proposed "jihadi action" drawing on the "successful experience of the Islamic Revolution" and the "Sacred Defence during the war with Iraq"¹⁴⁷ as local, organic solutions for an Islamic Iran. Preservation is deemed to facilitate the return of Islamic society to its authentic identity. With an emphasis on the admonitory value of heritage, referring to the Quranic concept of learning from humanity's mistakes [*ibrat*], ancient sites such as Persepolis are prescribed a new role as symbols of fallen kings.

I chose this particular syllabus because it was a key text that students had to study to pass the annual *Konkur*, and because it was taught across

144 Apart from a few academic dissertations, there were no significant publications dealing with urban conservation in the 1980s. Following the purging of NOPHM, what remained of the organization was merged into the newly formed ICHO, which also took on its predecessor's official journal, *Athar*. In this period, the publication's focus pivoted towards urban and architectural history and archaeology.

145 Ahmad Asgharian Jeddí, Farhad Fakhhar Tehrani, and Ghadiri, 'Jozveh-ye Dars-e Tarh-e Marmmat-e Bana [Subject Transcript for Architectural Conservation]', 1990.

146 The pre-Revolutionary national university of Iran, located in Tehran.

147 The term 'Sacred Defence' emphasizes the perception of the Iran-Iraq war as a just and defensive struggle against Saddam Hussein's aggression. The term has significant cultural and nationalistic meaning in Iran, symbolizing the unity, resilience, and sacrifice of the Iranian nation during the conflict. See: Pedram Khosronejad, *Unburied Memories: The Politics of Bodies of Sacred Defense Martyrs in Iran* (Routledge, 2013); Shabnam J Holliday, *Defining Iran: Politics of Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2016).

Iranian universities until at least the mid-2000s.¹⁴⁸ The position of the authors of this document is also echoed in the Cultural Heritage Law,¹⁴⁹ in the articles of the conservative, pro-state magazine *Keyhan Farhangi*,¹⁵⁰ and in Hodjat's book, *Cultural Heritage in Iran: Policies for an Islamic Country*,¹⁵¹ showing the overarching ideology ruling the administrative and academic spheres.

Towards the end of the 1980s, despite Revolutionary perseverance, part of the political elite were motivated to end the country's isolation. As political tensions eased, pre-Revolutionary conservationists and scholars returned to the universities and the ICHO as consultants or professors, while others took up teaching posts at the ICHO's Higher Education Centre (HEC), which was established in 1990 to address the organization's lack of staff.¹⁵²

In 1986, the University of Tehran organized an international conference¹⁵³ expressing the Islamic Republic's interest in re-starting international cultural and scientific cooperation. At the same time, the conference took a political stand, condemning the destructions in Isfahan and Khuzestan during the war with Iraq as a clear violation of the Hague

148 On the basis of personal interviews with conservation graduates from various Iranian universities.

149 Parliament of Iran, 'Ghanun-e Tashkil-e Sazman-e Miras-e Farhangi-e Keshvar [Law for the Establishment of the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organisation]'

150 Mehdi Hodjat, Bagher Ayatollah Zadeh Shirazi, and Mehdi Chamran, 'Ostad Mohammad Karim Pirnia va Osul-e Memari-e Sonnati [Master Mohammad Karim Pirnia and the Principles of Traditional Architecture]', *Kayhan Farhangi*, 1985; n. n., 'Masjed-e Jame-e Esfahan, Dayeratol-Ma'aref-e Eyni-e Honar-Ha-Ye Eslami [The Jame Mosque of Isfahan, an Encyclopedia of Islamic Architecture]', *Kayhan Farhangi*, 1985.

151 Hodjat, 'Cultural Heritage in Iran: Policies for an Islamic Country.'

152 Here, I draw upon my recollections of studying conservation at the HEC from 2002 to 2006, as well as my examination of the curriculum vitae of various conservation architects whom I have researched or interviewed. Farasatkah also noted partial reconciliation in national higher education policy in the early 2000s. See: Farasatkah, *The Adventure of University in Iran*.

153 n. n., 'International Conference on Reconstruction of the War-Damaged Areas, University of Tehran, Iran (6–16 March 1986)', *Athar* 7, no. 12–14 (1987): 97–101.

Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.¹⁵⁴

The proceedings of the First Seminar on the Continuation of Life in Iran's Historic Cities, held at Iran University of Science and Technology¹⁵⁵ in Tehran in 1987, also favoured traditionalism,¹⁵⁶ which was seen as a remedy against Western cultural hegemony.¹⁵⁷ However, most of the contributions in the seminar continued the 1970s debates on socio-spatial issues of housing in historic neighbourhoods, essentially pointing to the need for official guidelines for interventions in historic cities. Pointing out that those issues were debated inconclusively some 16 years earlier, with Falamaki,¹⁵⁸ Tavassoli,¹⁵⁹ and Daneshdoost arguing

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- 154 UNESCO, 'Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with Regulations for the Execution of the Convention' (Hague, 1954), <https://en.unesco.org/protecting-heritage/convention-and-protocols/1954-convention>.
- 155 The university was founded in 1929 as an engineering school.
- 156 To read about the connection between a preference for traditionalism and the Islamic Revolutionary ideology in Iran, refer to: Brad Hanson, 'The "Westoxication" of Iran: Depictions and Reactions of Behrangī, Āl-e Ahmad, and Shari'ati', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15, no. 1 (1983): 1–23.
- 157 Mehdi Hodjat, 'Arzesh-Ha-Ye Mojoud Dar Baft-e Tarikhi [Values of the Historic Fabric]', in *Kholasehy-e Maghalat: Seminar-e Tadavom-e Hayat Dar Baft-hay-e Ghadimi-e Shahrhay-e Iran [The Proceedings of the Seminar on the Continuation of Life in Iran's Historic Cities]* (Tehran: Iran University of Science and Technology, 1987), 58–65.
- 158 M. Mansour Falamaki, 'Ayandeh-Ye Baft-Ha-Ye Shahri-Ye Tarikhi-Ye Iran: Padideh-Ha va Badil-Ha [The Future of Urban Historic Fabrics in Iran: Phenomena and Alternatives]', in *Kholasehy-e Maghalat: Seminar-e Tadavom-e Hayat Dar Baft-hay-e Ghadimi-e Shahrhay-e Iran [The Proceedings of the Seminar on the Continuation of Life in Iran's Historic Cities]* (Tehran: Iran University of Science and Technology, 1987), 121–32.
- 159 Mahmoud Tavassoli, 'Baft-e Ghadim, Moghadameh-i Bar Masaleh [The Historic City, an Introduction to the Issue]', in *Kholasehy-e Maghalat: Seminar-e Tadavom-e Hayat Dar Baft-hay-e Ghadimi-e Shahrhay-e Iran [The Proceedings of the Seminar on the Continuation of Life in Iran's Historic Cities]* (Tehran: Iran University of Science and Technology, 1987), 5–15.

that the authorities “understand but do not take action”,¹⁶⁰ the issue had since been exacerbated by war refugees now housed in economically and physically impoverished historic districts. Falamaki, the organizer of the first seminar on the same topic at the University of Tehran in 1971, told me that after the Revolution, his proposal for organizing a second seminar in the 1980s was rejected. Instead, another ‘first seminar’ was organized after 16 years, reflecting the new academic system’s intent to establish their own conference rather than building on pre-revolutionary discourse. However, despite their efforts, the papers presented at this new conference still showed a clear reliance on pre-revolutionary ideas, highlighting the ongoing dependence of the academic discourse on these earlier concepts.

Post-war recovery and the heritage turn

In 1989, Rafsanjani won the presidential election (and remained in office until August 1997) on an agenda of economic development and reconstruction. During the 1990s, a notable characteristic was the preservation of a limited number of historic buildings, while simultaneously witnessing the widespread demolition of deteriorating historic neighbourhoods. This trend emerged as a response to the post-war reconstruction pressure. Although the High Council for Architecture and Urban Planning (HCAUP)¹⁶¹ approved urban rehabilitation plans called ‘Cultural-historical Axis’ plans for selected cities such as Tabriz, Isfahan, Shiraz,

160 Yaqoub Daneshdoost, ‘Tarhi Bara-Ye Tadavom-e Hayat va Hefz-e Baft-e Tarikhi-Ye Shahr-Ha [A Plan for the Survival and Conservation of Urban Historic Fabric]’, in *Kholasehy-e Maghalat: Seminar-e Tadavom-e Hayat Dar Baftay-e Ghadimi-e Shahrhay-e Iran [The Proceedings of the Seminar on the Continuation of Life in Iran’s Historic Cities]* (Tehran: Iran University of Science and Technology, 1987), 74.

161 A legal body under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the HCAUP was founded in 1966 to define and supervise urban planning policies in Iran.

Kerman, and Hamedan, the plans remained largely unexecuted due to their insufficient integration within urban Master Plans.¹⁶²

The lack of technical coherence in urban Master Plans was partly due to challenges encountered in cross-organizational and cross-sectoral cooperation between parties such as the ICHO, the Ministry of Urban Development, and private urban planning professionals. While not explored extensively within academic literature, diverse experts¹⁶³ have spoken openly about official bodies' limitations in dealing with local power-holders, such as governors, influential private or parastatal landowners, and Awqaf managers.¹⁶⁴ As Akbar Taghizadeh,¹⁶⁵ a former cultural heritage official of Eastern Azerbaijan, noted, the HCAUP was politicized from the start, like any other institution in Iran. Thus, its function depended more on the individuals in charge than on legal and administrative mechanisms. Or, as Falamaki noted, the very law that could prevent demolitions in some cities was ineffective in others,

162 M. Taghi Rahnamaei and Parvaneh Shah Hosseini, *Process of Urban Planning in Iran*, 2nd ed. (Tehran: SAMT, 2012); Hanachi, Diba, and Mahdavinejad, 'Hefazat va Tose'e Dar Iran [Conservation and Development in Iran]'.

163 Personal fieldnotes at professional meetings, for instance, the First National Symposium on Conservation and Management of Urban Heritage, organized by the Research Centre of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, Tehran, 12–13 February 2022. Also mentioned by the former Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development (2013–2019) in a personal interview on 7 January 2020 in Tehran.

164 For example, see the former heritage official, H. Ravanfar's interview with Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA) about the destruction of the listed Khosrow-gha Bathhouse in Isfahan with the support of the local clerics, the governor and the municipality. See: Shirin Mostaqasi, 'Ravayati Az Takhrib-e Hammam-e Kosrow-Agha [A Narrative of the Demolition of the Khosrow Agha Bathhouse].', *Iranian Students' News Agency*, 9 April 2022, isna.ir/xdMc64.

165 'Gocaman Tabriz 6: Interview with Mr Akbar Taghizadeh'.

especially in religious cities like Mashhad, Qom, and Shiraz.¹⁶⁶ The willingness and power of the authorities to take action against violations of approved plans could thus depend on the national and local political climate.

In the post-war economic atmosphere, the ICHO made a transition from the earlier conservation and research-based approach to an Ashworthian economy-oriented, heritage approach.¹⁶⁷ A pragmatic administration that was in tune with the new politics¹⁶⁸ gradually replaced the early Revolutionary management style that used to distance itself from tourism and saw economic valorization of cultural heritage as a catalyst for Westernization. At the ICHO, Rafsanjani's principle of economic development was manifested by transferring the organisation to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, which was responsible for tourism.

The new economic approach also emphasized the adaptive reuse of historic places.¹⁶⁹ A notable example was carried out in Tabriz, where a group of historic houses in the Maghsudiyeh neighbourhood were included in the National Heritage List, acquired, and repurposed as the

166 M. Mansour Falamaki, 'Fardai Baray-e Yek Gharn Tajrobeh Maremat-e Shahri Dar Iran [A Future for a Quarter-Century of Urban Conservation Experience in Iran]', in *Proceedings: Hamayesh-e Takhasosi-e Baft-Ha-Ye Shahri, 28–29 Khordad 1376-Mashhad-e Moghadas [Specialized Conference on Urban Fabrics, 18–19 June 1997, Mashhad]* (Specialized Conference on Urban Fabrics, 18–19 June 1997, Mashhad, Mashhad: Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, 1997), 713–34.

167 Ashworth, 'Conservation as Preservation or as Heritage: Two Paradigms and Two Answers'.

168 For instance, see Nasser Pazouki, 'Mabani-e Miras-e Farhangi [Principles of Cultural Heritage]', *Mirath-e Farhangi*, no. 17 (1997): 82–84. An ICHO official argued that in addition to spiritual growth (based on the Revolutionary values), attracting tourism and respecting international conventions could be valuable aims of conservation.

169 ICHO and Ministry of Urban Development and Housing co-published a book on this topic. See: Jasem Ghazbanpour, *Zendegi-e Jadid-Kalbad Chadim: Gozideh-i Az Bana-Ha-Ye Baarzesh-e Tarikhi [New Life – Old Structure: A Selection of Valuable Historic Buildings]* (Tehran: Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, 1993).

Tabriz University of Islamic Arts. The House of the Constitution in Tabriz was another example of a reuse project.¹⁷⁰

I interviewed a former manager of the Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) who was appointed Director of the Tehran branch of the ICHO in 1995 to help the PBO find a solution for the ICHO's "never-ending research projects and conservation workshops". He also drew attention to the break in policy directions at the end of one administration and the beginning of another. He said:

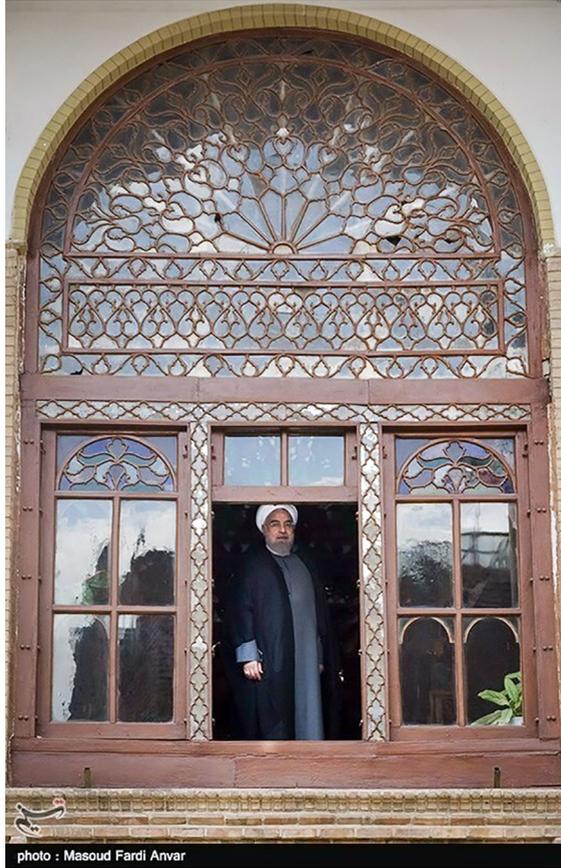
Originally, my assignment at [the] ICHO was temporary. After specializing in cultural heritage, I should have returned to the PBO to establish and manage a cultural heritage office that could supervise the country's cultural heritage economy. With the political changes [the election of President Khatami] in 1997, a new team with new ideas came to power. So; the original plan was cancelled, and I stayed at ICHO.¹⁷¹

The repetition of such shifts led to a waste of resources invested not only in projects, but also in training individual personnel and restructuring the administrative infrastructure.

170 In the period leading up to the Constitutional Revolution and thereafter, the house served as a meeting point for the movement's leaders in Tabriz.

171 Interview with Ardeshir Oruji former senior advisor to ICHO and former Director General of the ICHO Office for Statistics and Information Planning, 19 April 2021 via Skype.

Figure 16: President Hassan Rouhani visiting the House of the Constitution in Tabriz



©Tasnim News Agency, 2015

Political reform: Territorializing heritage between two identity discourses

The Twenty-Year Vision Document prepared in 2003 depicted Iran in 2025 as an economically and technologically developed country with constructive international relations and an Islamic Revolutionary identity that would serve as an inspiration to the Islamic world.¹⁷² The document legitimized tourism and national identity on the condition that Islamic Revolutionary values were upheld. However, while overarching policy documents such as the Vision Document and national development plans defined the targets, as we will see in the coming sections, a deep gap emerged between those policies and their implementation.

Following the election of Mohammad Khatami¹⁷³ and his subsequent attempts at reform, political opposition intensified between factions controlling different state organizations and economic sectors. In particular, when the government launched decentralization and privatization policies in the 1990s, parastatal organizations such as the IRGC¹⁷⁴ became omnipresent players in economic sectors such as banking, housing, and construction.¹⁷⁵ Many important politicians were also members of the abovementioned ideological, economic, and military network.

172 The document was prepared by various government entities and experts under the supervision of the Supreme Leader of Iran. Expediency Discernment Council, 'Sanad-e Cheshmandaz-e Jomhuri-e Eslami-e Iran Dar Ofoq-e 1404 [Twenty-Year Vision Document of the Islamic Republic of Iran for 2025]', 2003.

173 In office between 1997 and 2005.

174 For instance, the largest contractor of state development projects is a branch of IRGC, called Khatam-al Anbiya Construction Headquarters. The Kowsar Economic Organization [*Sazman-e Eghtesadi-e Kowsar*], which owns several companies is another actor connected to Bonyad-e Shahid (a para-governmental organization) and Khatam-al Anbia Construction Headquarters.

175 Saeidi, 'The Accountability of Para-Governmental Organizations (Bonyads): The Case of Iranian Foundations'; Kevan Harris, 'The Rise of the Subcontractor State: Politics of Pseudo-Privatization in the Islamic Republic of Iran', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 1 (2013): 45–70, doi:10.1017/S0020743812001250.

This continued into the new millennium, during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidential term from 2005 to 2013, when Islamic Revolutionary networks, including the IRGC, remained the main subcontractors of state organizations or partners of private companies.¹⁷⁶

Domestic and foreign cultural politics also gave rise to competition between reform-oriented and Revolutionary identity narratives. Holliday described the opposition between reformers and hardliners as a clash between two primary identity discourses, with hardliners emphasizing Islamic values and reformers grounded in Islamic-Iranian values.¹⁷⁷ On one side, media such as the hardline news publication *Keyhan-e Farhangi* promoted Islamist discourse, which demanded a more effective implementation of the Cultural Revolution and warned of the dangers of globalization.¹⁷⁸ On the other, the reformists sought to legitimize President Khatami's slogans of Islamic democracy and dialogue between civilizations within the frame of the Islamic Revolutionary narrative.¹⁷⁹

As we will see in the following pages, during this period, urban heritage assemblage entered a process of re-territorialization within national and international legal and academic frameworks. However, under the influence of the political struggles mentioned above, most of the processes were halted or redirected in the 2000s.

To ensure the consistency of the ICHO's policies with those of the High Council for the Cultural Revolution, the director of the ICHO became a member of the High Council's Committee for Public Culture

176 Harris, 'The Rise of the Subcontractor State: Politics of Pseudo-Privatization in the Islamic Republic of Iran'.

177 Holliday, *Defining Iran: Politics of Resistance*.

178 For example see: Reza Davari et al., 'Shoray-e Ali-e Enghelab-e Farhangi; Masuliat-Ha-Ye Ayandeh [High Council of Cultural Revolution; Future Responsibilities]', *Keyhan-e Farhangi*, 1997; Seyyed Hamid Molana et al., 'Tamadon-Ha; Gof-o-Gu va Nazdiki Ya Ruyaruyi va Keshmakesh [Civilisations, Dialogue and Intercession or Confrontation and Conflict]', *Keyhan-e Farhangi*, 1998.

179 For instance, the reactivation of city councils in 1999 was a step toward Islamic democracy. Although city councils had legally functioned in Iran since 1930, they did not involve significant public participation.

in 1998. By 2000, the High Council became the key supervisory body for cultural policy, acting in accordance with the Supreme Leader's official directives. In 2002, the High Council adopted a directive establishing a committee for the preservation of cultural heritage within the framework of the National Security Council.¹⁸⁰ Chaired by the ICHO Director, the committee included representatives from the judiciary, the Awqaf Organization, the IRGC, the Ministry of Intelligence, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, and the police. The aforementioned directives for instance, limited the ICHO's authority over maintenance and conservation plans for Awqaf, aiming to amplify the clergy's role in supervising religious heritage sites.

One of the first projects of the 2000s was the establishment of a political-ideological museum in Jamaran, Tehran. The ICHO made use of the 1973 Law on the National Heritage Listing,¹⁸¹ which made it possible to define sites as protected national heritage regardless of their construction date, to list Ayatollah Khomeini's house and Hosseineh¹⁸² in Jamaran.¹⁸³ Inclusion of the museum in the list was justified based on the criterion of national importance. Another example is the Ibrat Museum (Museum of Admonition), which was set up as a "museum of intangible heritage" in Tehran.¹⁸⁴ Launched in 2001, the project reused the former Pahlavi-era prison under the supervision of the ICHO to narrate the memories of political prisoners of the previous state, including Islamic Revolutionary figures such as Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, and Ayatollah Naser Makarem-e Shirazi. The preservation of

180 High Council of Cultural Revolution, 'Ayin-Nameh-Ye Hefazat Az Miras-e Farhangi-e Keshvar [Iran's Cultural Heritage Conservation Guideline]', 2002.

181 Parliament of Iran, 'Ghanoon-e Sabt-e Athar-e Melli, Aban 1352 [National Heritage Listing Law, 1973]', 1973.

182 A Hosseineh is a religious institution or building in Iran primarily used for Shia Islamic rituals and gatherings.

183 Jamaran, situated in the northern part of Tehran city, was the residence of Ayatollah Khomeini.

184 Maryam Azadi and Ghasem Hassanpour, 'Muzeh-Ye Miras-e Gheir-e Malmus [Museum of Intangible Heritage]', *Keyhan-e Farhangi*, 2006.

houses of Revolutionary and historical figures such as Mostafa Chamran¹⁸⁵ in Tehran and Haj Agha Nourollah Najafi¹⁸⁶ in Isfahan and the establishment of museums in these houses was a collaborative activity between municipalities and heritage authorities as part of the state's integrated cultural policies.

Figure 17: Mostafa Chamran's museum-house in Tehran



Author, 2020

185 First Defence Minister of post-Revolutionary Iran, commander of paramilitary volunteers in the Iran-Iraq War, killed in that war. He also served as a military participant in the Shia Amal movement in Lebanon.

186 A Shia cleric from Isfahan active in Iran's Constitutional Revolution in the late Qajar period.

The state's overarching identity politics¹⁸⁷ also justified the Setad-e Bazsazi-e Atabat Aliyat's¹⁸⁸ generous donations from public and Awqaf funds for renovating, and redeveloping Shia shrines in Samarra, Karbala,¹⁸⁹ and Najaf¹⁹⁰ in Iraq, as well as religious sites elsewhere outside Iran.¹⁹¹ In 2006, Shahid Beheshti University engaged in the development plan for the Alavi Shrine in Najaf and its reintegration with the surrounding urban fabric, which was the home of Shia clergy, including Ayatollah Khomeini. With the support of Iran's Supreme Leader, local Shia figures such as Ayatollah Sistani and the Setad-e Bazsazi-e Atabat Aliyat, the project asserted its Shia interests within the power dynamics in Najaf.¹⁹² Under the narrative of Sacred Defence, the project aimed to protect the shrine and revitalize the Shia neighbourhoods destroyed by Saddam Hussein. In separate interviews, two Shahid Beheshti University alumni told me about the strict Islamic ideological and gender criteria for student assistants who were to participate in these projects.

The ongoing resistance to conservation principles in religious places, especially in sites under the administration of the Awqaf clergy, seem to stem partially from conflicting approaches between traditional and

187 For instance, the Twenty-Year Vision Document.

188 According to its official website, the headquarters was established in 2003. It is a parastatal organization committed to the reconstruction of shrines and religious places in Iraq and other countries and provides scientific, cultural, educational, health, civil and humanitarian services. See: <https://en.atabat.org/en>. Khatam-al Anbiya Construction Headquarters has also been involved in the projects.

189 The burial site of Husayn ibn Ali, the iconic Shia Imam, believed to have passed away in the Battle of Karbala.

190 The Shrine of Imam Ali, the first Shia Imam.

191 Sam Dagher, 'Devotion and Money Tie Iranians to Iraqi City', *The New York Times*, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/31/world/middleeast/31karbala.html?smid=url-share>.

192 Based on my fieldnotes at the online presentation by Ali Ghaffari (former Director of the Shahid Beheshti University) and Ruhollah Movahedi (a faculty member at Shahid Beheshti University), on Najaf's Story [*Dastan-e Najaf*], organized by the National Contemporary Architecture Centre of Shahid Beheshti University, 27 January 2022.

modern philosophies in dealing with historical ruins.¹⁹³ Due to the emphasis placed by sharia law on the continuity of spiritual use, religious sites have traditionally prioritized construction measures that cater to religious functions such as pilgrimage, prayer, or religious education.¹⁹⁴ In terms of heritage planning, the historic shrines and their surroundings are traditionally viewed as containers of Shia religious practice.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, conservation principles such as evidence-based preservation, reversibility, or authenticity of material and architectural form are not prioritized. This has been a continuous tradition at historical religious sites before and after the 1979 Revolution. However, prior to the Revolution, the conservation bureaucracy had stronger enforcement, leading to a less evident conflict. With the Islamization of the state, the underlying philosophical conflicts became more pronounced. In earlier sections, I offered a succinct explanation of this intervention logic, supported by examples like the *musalla* project in Tabriz and Mashhad.¹⁹⁶ In several other cases, such as Shiraz and Najaf, shrine development projects have followed a similar approach.¹⁹⁷

193 See: Yadollahi, 'Reflections on the Past and Future of Urban Conservation in Iran'.

194 For the example of Najaf, see: SK Abid, 'Imam Ali Shrine, Institution and Cultural Monument: The Implications of Cultural Significance and Its Impact on Local Conservation Management', *Structural Studies, Repairs and Maintenance of Heritage Architecture XIV* 153 (2015): 87–98.

195 The same approach can be seen in the case of Arg-e Alishah in Tabriz, discussed in the previous pages. Or the Sadeghiyeh Seminary School in the World Heritage site of Tabriz Bazaar, that I have discussed elsewhere: Solmaz Yadollahi, 'Tracing the Identity-Driven Ambitions of the Iranian Urban Conservation Apparatus', *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice*, 30 June 2019, 1–20, doi:10.1080/17567505.2019.1637081.

196 Also see: Mohammad Saeid Izadi, 'A Study on City Centre Regeneration: A Comparative Analysis of Two Different Approaches to the Revitalisation of Historic City Centres in Iran' (Doctoral thesis, Newcastle University, 2008), <http://hdl.handle.net/10443/759>.

197 Also discussed by involved actors at: Ali Chaffari and Ruhollah Movahedi, 'Najaf's Story (Dastan-e Najaf)' (National Contemporary Architecture Centre of Shahid Beheshti University, 27 January 2022), BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg, Chair

Figure 18: General Qasem Soleimani visiting the Alavi Shrine project in Najaf in 2018¹⁹⁸



Figure 19: Development plan connecting the holy shrines in Karbala



© Setad-e Bazzazi-e Atabat Aliyat, 2020

of Urban Management, Fieldnotes; 'Public Discussion: Tajrobe-Ye Mashhad; Ebrat-e Shiraz, Be Name Ziyarat, Dar Barabar-e Tarikh [Mashhad's Experience; Lesson for Shiraz, In the Name of Pilgrimage, Against History]' (Student Union of Architecture Restoration and Urban Planning, 26 February 2022), Fieldnotes. 198 (<https://www.nasim.news/fa/tiny/news-2250340>)

The religious approach mentioned, together with the economic ambitions of the clergy, has almost always defeated conservation theory in Iranian cities. Falamaki, who was responsible for planning the destroyed area around the shrines in the historic centre of Shiraz, wrote that, following the Revolution, some actors were determined to draw parallel lines connecting two shrines, calling the axis *Beynolharamain* (the sacred path between two shrines).¹⁹⁹ By the time he was commissioned to propose a plan for the area, the shrine development project had already destroyed some 17,000m² of the city's historic fabric between 1995 and 1997.

In parallel, Khatami's reformist government used institutional and legal opportunities to expand and improve international relations. For example, the Third National Development Plan allowed the use of international funds and cooperation with UNESCO and other international institutions.²⁰⁰ Between 2001 and 2003, Iran ratified the 1954 Hague Convention,²⁰¹ reactivated ICOM-Iran, and established ICOMOS-Iran. Despite international NGOs such as ICOMOS playing highly politicized roles in Iran, the resumption of their activities was a sign of relative political openness compared to the early years after the Revolution.

199 Falamaki, *Seiri Dar Tajarob-e Maremmat-e Shari, as Veniz Ta Shiraz [An Essay on Urban Conservation, From Venice to Shiraz]*.

200 Parliament of Iran, 'Chanun-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]', *The Official Magazine: Rooznameh-e Rasmi-e Keshvar*, 2000.

201 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

Figure 20: The Shahecheragh Development project in Shiraz



© Astan-e Shahecheragh, 2020

Figure 21: Imam Reza Shrine in Mashhad



© Astan Quds Razavi Information Database, n.d.

In 2003, Yazd once again became the host of the Terra Conference, after a span of 27 years. In the same year, after a 24-year hiatus in World Heritage List inscription, Iran submitted a nomination for the inclusion of a site on the World Heritage List.²⁰² With the inclusion of Bam and its Cultural Landscape on the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger in 2004,²⁰³ international cooperation was strengthened at ICHO research centres in Bam and elsewhere. The international workshop on the Recovery of Bam's Cultural Heritage in 2004 proposed the preparation of a comprehensive master plan that took into account the future social and economic development of the city and required the cooperation of governmental and non-governmental institutions and associations at the national and international levels.²⁰⁴ The ICHO project with the UNESCO/Japan Trust Fund in Tchogha Zanbil was another example of the same approach, reflecting the government's willingness to reform. At the conclusion of the project in 2006, the international project partners, ICHO staff, and students from related disciplines participated in a training workshop on the conservation and management of earthen cultural heritage. Following more than two decades of political and professional isolation, Iranian academics and professionals had been presented with the opportunity for international collaboration.

In a chain of similar international experiences and events, the terminology of the guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention²⁰⁵ appeared more and more frequently in academic publications and dissertations in Farsi.²⁰⁶ This was influenced also by the her-

202 Takht-e Soleyman

203 After being largely damaged by the 2003 earthquake.

204 UNESCO-Tehran and ICHO, 'The BAM Declaration and Recommendations' (UNESCO, 2004), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000190150>.

205 See: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>

206 For example see. Younes Samadi, *Cultural heritage in domestic and international Law in Iran [Miras-e Farhangi dar Hoghugh-e Dakheli va Benalmelali]* (Tehran: ICHO, 2003); Younes Samadi, *The collection of Laws, Regulations, Guidelines, Circular Notes, and Conventions of the Cultural Heritage Organization [Majmue' Ghavanin, Ayin-nameh-ha, Bakhshnameh-ha va Moahadat-e Sazman-e Mirath-e Frhangi-e Keshvar]* (Tehran: ICHO, 2004); M. Hassan Talebian, 'The Role of Authenticity in Conser-

ityge authorities who taught at local universities. Similar to the religious projects in Najaf and Karbala mentioned above, World Heritage nominations and other ICHHTO²⁰⁷ activities were connected to academic internships and dissertations.

Figure 22: The 2004 International Workshop on the Recovery of Bam's Cultural Heritage²⁰⁸



For a certain period in the mid-2000s, the reformist strategy of international conciliation appeared to be relatively successful in World Heritage sites. For example, heritage authorities succeeded in preventing the commercial Jahan Nama Tower from affecting the visual integrity of the Meidan-e Naghsh-e Jahan World Heritage Site.²⁰⁹ It is worth noting

vation of World Heritage Sites the Experiences from Dur-Untash for Authenticity-Based Conservation' (University of Tehran, 2005).

207 The successor to the ICHO.

208 Eskandar Mokhtari Taleghani, ed., *Gozaresh-Ha va Maghalat-e Salaneh-Ye Projeh-Ye Nejatbakhshi-e Miras-e Farhangi-e Bam-(Arg)* [Annual Reports and Papers of the Bam Cultural Heritage Recovery Project-(Arg)], vol. 1, 2 (Tehran: Research Base of Arg-e Bam, 2005), 257.

209 Feng Jing and Pedro A. Calderon, 'MISSION REPORT / Meidan Emam, Esfahan (Islamic Republic of Iran) (C 115)' (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2013), <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/115/documents/>.

that the Municipality of Isfahan, a powerful opponent of World Heritage policy at that time, held a significant stake in the Jahan Nama Tower. In Yazd, collaboration between heritage agencies, the private sector, and the municipality resulted in the city's inclusion on the World Heritage List in 2017.²¹⁰

The resurgence of critical heritage journalism²¹¹ was also a result of the heritage planning assemblage that was being formed during the mid-2000s. As in many large cities around the world, the struggles over the preservation of World Heritage sites and development in Tabriz²¹² and Tehran²¹³ consistently made news headlines.

210 Not to lose sight of the fact that the mentioned cooperations have led to new problems concerning social justice and fair distribution of the social and economic benefits of the city's World Heritage status. See: Raymond Rastegar, Zohreh Zarezadeh, and Ulrike Gretzel, 'World Heritage and Social Justice: Insights from the Inscription of Yazd, Iran', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 29, no. 2–3 (2021): 521–40.

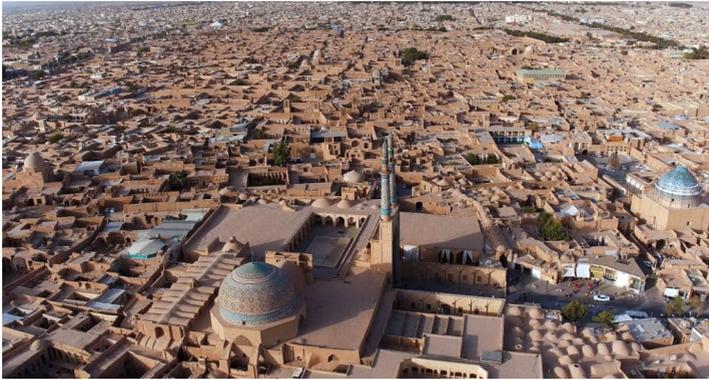
211 See the section on: Debating urban heritage planning within the framework of urban renewal.

212 As reported by the MRUD, for example see: Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, 'Joziyat-e Mosavabeh-Ye Mashroot-e Tarh-e Jame-e Tabriz [In Hanachi's Letter to the Governor of Eastern Azerbaijan; Details of the Contingent Approval of the Tabriz Master Plan]', *MRUD News Service*, 12 August 2016; Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, 'Tey-e Nameh Az Suy-e Moaven-e Vazir-e Rah va Sharsazi Matrah Shod; Takid-e Mojaddad Bar Roayat-e Mosavabat-e Shoray-e Ali-e Sharsazi Baray-e Hargooneh Sakht va Saz Dar Javar-e Bazar-e Sabt-e Jahaniy-e Tabriz [In a Letter from the Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development; Re-Emphasizing the Need to Comply with the Approvals of the High Council of Urban Planning for All Construction Projects in the Vicinity of the World Heritage Site of Tabriz Bazaar]', *MRUD News Service*, 28 July 2018. And mentioned by Nejadbrahimi, Deputy of Cultural Heritage, Tabriz in an interview with Jam-eJam Eastern Azerbaijan. See: Amin Bilsaz, 'Tabriz Hal Nadarad [Tabriz Is Not Well]', *Jam-e-Jam*, 4 March 2021, <https://jamejamonline.ir/005UZg>.

213 See: World Heritage Committee, *Decision 38 COM 8B.45* (Doha: UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 2014); ISNA, 'Hokmi Ke Sabt-e Jahaniy-e Kakh-e Golestan Ra Tahdid Mikonad [A Decision That Threatens Golestan Palace's World Heritage Status]', *ISNA*, 9 January 2022, isna.ir/xdKH9P.

In urban planning, the reformists declared their approach for the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MHUD) at their 1997 Mashhad Conference.²¹⁴ Key terms of the conference were urban identity, civic empowerment, and participation of the private sector, all pictured with a bottom-up planning approach for the future. This coincided with MHUD's establishment of the Housing Development and Construction Company (HDCC) to coordinate the activities of municipalities, state organizations such as ICHHTO, and the private sector in the old urban fabrics. HDCC's comprehensive investigation of the urban management system in deteriorated areas highlighted incoherent and overlapping parallel procedures carried out by diverse organizations and actors.²¹⁵

Figure 23: Yazd, an aerial view



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214 Seyyed Mohsen Habibi et al., eds., *Proceedings: Hamayesh-e Takhasosi-e Baft-Ha-Ye Shahri*, 28–29 Khordad 1376–Mashhad-e Moghadas [Specialized Conference on Urban Fabrics, 18–19 June 1997, Mashhad] (Mashhad: Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, 1997).

215 Nilpar Honarvar, 'Iranian Experiences Of Urban Restoration', *HaftShahr* 1, no. 3 (2001): 14–31.

Figure 24: The preserved roofscape of Tabriz Bazaar, the 1990s



© ICHHTO-Eastern Azerbaijan

With the goal of integrating policy with a set of practical tools to address urban decay nationwide, HDCC organized cross-sector conferences involving urban planning and heritage authorities, municipalities, universities, developers, and planning consultants.²¹⁶ In 2000, HDCC founded *HaftShahr*, an interdisciplinary journal on urban heritage, conservation, and urban regeneration, bringing together actors from the fields of heritage and urban and regional planning. Reflecting the overarching national policies of privatization and decentralization, the

216 Haftshahr, 'Gozaresh-e Avalin Hamayesh-e Behsazi va Nosazi-e Baft-Ha-Ye Farsoodeh, Mashhad, 1387 [Report of the First Conference on Regeneration and Revitalisation of Urban Distressed Areas, Mashhad, 2008]', *HaftShahr* 4, no. 43–44 (2014): 145–61; Housing Development and Construction Company and Housing Development and Construction Company-Fars, *Dovomin Hamayesh-e Behsazi va Bazafarini-e BaftHa-Ye Tarikhi, Farsoodeh-Ye Shahri va Sokunatgahha-Ye Gheir-e Rasmi, Shiraz, 1389 [Second Conference on the Improvement and Regeneration of Historic, Distressed Urban Fabrics and Informal Settlements, Shiraz, 2010]* (Shiraz: Navid-e Shiraz, 2011).

journal published a series of interviews and roundtables to interconnect values-based conservation and international heritage guidelines with domestic issues of identity, earthquake risk preparedness, and housing.²¹⁷ Consequently, urban planners became key players in heritage policy, which had previously been carried out by ICHHTO conservation architects, archaeologists, and architectural historians.

The mentioned interdisciplinary discussions, led by bureaucrat-academics, aligned with the objectives outlined in the Third and Fourth National Development Plans,²¹⁸ establishing the conceptual and legal prerequisites for the 2014 National Urban Regeneration Programme.²¹⁹ Nevertheless, parallel to administrative and academic efforts to territorialize heritage policy and practice in cities, heterogeneous de-territorializing forces were at work.

At the government level, urban renewal funds became a major factor hindering heritage preservation. In the absence of a clear legal distinction between decayed and historic urban areas, provinces competed to

217 For instance: Habib Jabari, ed., 'Modakhele Dar Baft-Ha-Ye Shahri va Masale-Ye Mosharekat [Interventions in Urban Fabric and the Participation Issue]', *Haft-Shahr* 2, no. 4 (2001): 28–46; Asghar Mohammadmoradi, 'Editor's Note: Zaroorat-e Maremat [The Essentiality of Conservation]', *Haft-Shahr* 4, no. 12 (2003): 3; Ardeshir Oruji, 'Darshayi Ke Az Zelzeleh-Ye Bam Mitavan Amookht [Lessons to Be Learnt From the Bam Earthquake]', *Haft-Shahr* 5, no. 17 (2005): 86–89.

218 Parliament of Iran, 'Chanun-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]'; Parliament of Iran, 'Chanun-e Barnamey-e Chaharom-e Tose-Ey-e Eghtesadi, Ejtemai va Farhangi-e Jomhuriy-e Eslami-e Iran [The Law of the Fourth Plan of Economic, Social and Cultural Development of Islamic Republic of Iran]', *The Official Magazine: Rooznameh-e Rasmi-e Keshvar*, 2004.

219 The National Document for Regeneration, passed by the Parliament in 2014 was a result of these activities. Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, 'Sanad-e Melli-e Rahbordi-e Ehya, Behsazi va Nosazi va Tavanmandsazi-e Bafthaye Farsudeh va Nakaramad-e Shahri [The National Strategic Document for Revitalization, Rehabilitation, Renovation, and Reinforcement of Deteriorated and Dysfunctional Urban Fabrics]' (MRUD, 2014).

designate larger areas as decayed urban fabric to receive more renewal funds from the government.²²⁰

At the municipal level, municipalities began shifting toward economic independence in the late 1990s under the decentralization policies. The process resulted in the phenomenon of density selling.²²¹ On the one hand, density selling provided a large source of income for the municipalities, fuelling corruption.²²² On the other hand, it provided a solution for housing the growing urban populations and encouraged small- and large-scale redevelopment projects in historic cities. A famous example of this kind was the unregulated increase in density sales capacity in Tehran between 2007 and 2012.²²³

The aforementioned privatization policies in the areas of urban planning and cultural heritage also triggered an influx of investors and developers into the historic districts. Public, private, and para-governmental rent-seeking investors began to invest in construction and

220 Naser Bonyadi, Giti Etemad, and Farhad Golizadeh, 'Goftoguyi Dar Khosuse Siyasat-Ha va Barnameh-Ha-Ye Behsazi va Nosazi-Ye Shahri Dar Iran [A Roundtable Discussion on Urban Improvement and Urban Renewal Policies in Iran]', *HaftShahr*, no. 33–34 (2011): 129–34.

221 Density is understood as floor area ratio of buildings. As part of the post-war economic decentralization policies of the 1990s, the government started to cut municipality funds. To solve the funding shortfall, municipalities were allowed to use private capital by granting density bonuses to property developers. In other words, municipalities could allow developers to build taller buildings if they paid the associated fines. See: Abolghasem Azhdari, Mehdi Ali-dadi, and Dorina Pojani, 'What Drives Urban Densification? Free Market versus Government Planning in Iran', *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 2022, 0739456X221126625.

222 Hasan Abedi Jafari et al., *Sanjesh-e Fesad va Salamati Sazmani Shahrdari-e Tehran [Measuring Corruption and Organizational Health of the Municipality of Tehran]* (Tehran: Research and Planning Centre of Municipality of Tehran, 2016).

223 Fieldnotes of the public Clubhouse debate on 'Wounds on Tehran Detailed Plan' held on June 9th, 2021, where urban planners who were involved in the preparation of Tehran's Detailed Plan reviewed illegal changes in the document between 2007 and 2012. Also see: Mahyar Arefi, 'Towards a Conceptual Framework for Urban Management: The Iranian Experience', *City, Culture and Society* 4, no. 1 (2013): 37–48.

housing in Iran.²²⁴ As privatization processes unfolded and conservative hardliners assumed power, historic buildings experienced a dual effect. On the one hand, they gained heightened redevelopment value; on the other, they became less safeguarded by heritage laws. Consequently, from the mid-2000s, the explicit protection of private property in accordance with Islamic sharia—as outlined in the early 1980s Guardian Council decision—regained support.²²⁵

A study conducted by the Research Institute of the Iranian Judiciary shows that court cases resulting in the delisting of National Heritage properties due to a lawsuit brought by a private plaintiff increased after 2005.²²⁶ The report argues that heritage authorities were unable to win disputes against private owners, except for a few cases with technical issues.²²⁷

My informal conversations with conservation professionals and Neighbourhood Development Offices (NDOs) in Tehran's historic area confirm that cultural heritage authorities sometimes deliberately failed to meet the conditions for legal protection in exchange for a bribe from

224 Ilia Farahani and Shadi Yousefi, 'Public Housing, Intersectoral Competition, and Urban Ground Rent: Iran's First Public Housing Program That Never Was', *Human Geography* 14, no. 1 (2021): 45–61.

225 Also according to: Parliament of Iran, 'Ghanoon-e Mojazat-e Eslami [Islamic Penal Law 5th Vol.]' (The Official Magazine: Rooznameh-e Rasmi-e Keshvar, 1996), art. 569; Parliament of Iran, 'Ghanun-e Divan-e Edalat-e Edari [Law of the Administrative Court of Justice]' (The Official Magazine: Rooznameh-e Rasmi-e Keshvar, 2006), art. 13 (1); Parliament of Iran, 'Ghanun-e Tashkilat va Ain-e Dadresi Divan-e Edalat-e Edari [Law on the Organization and Procedure of the Administrative Court of Justice]' (The Official Magazine: Rooznameh-e Rasmi-e Keshvar, 2013), art. 10.

226 Judiciary Research Institute-Iran, *Malekiyat-e Khosusi Ya Manfaat-e Omumi?: Naghd-e Raviye Shoabe Edalat-e Edari Piramun-e Ebtal-e Tasmim-e Sazman-e Miras-e Farhangi va Tarikhi Dar Fehrest-e Athar-e Melli [Private Property or Public Interest? A Critique of the Administrative Court Branches' Procedure Regarding the Annulment of the Cultural Heritage Organization's Decision in the Listing of National Monuments]* (Tehran: Judiciary of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2014).

227 For instance, in cases where the plaintiff was not a private owner or the submitted petition was incomplete.

the plaintiff. For instance, the Delgosha commercial centre that became famous for threatening the Golestan Palace World Heritage site's skyline was built on a demolished historic caravanserai (Saray-e Delgosha) in the Tehran Bazaar. The listed caravanserai, which was owned²²⁸ by the para-governmental organizations Bonyad-e Mostazafan and Bonyad-e Shahid²²⁹ and a group of private owners, was removed from the list with judicial approval. Some believe that ICHHTO-Tehran played a determining role in both the delisting of the historic caravanserai²³⁰ and the new building's generous height permission.²³¹

228 According to the building's National Listing dossier prepared in 2007 (available at ICHHTO-Tehran archive).

229 Bonyad-e Mostazafan (Foundation of the Oppressed) and Bonyad-e Shahid (Foundation for Martyrs' and Veterans' Affairs) were two major Revolutionary bonyads that became economic powers after confiscating the properties of pre-Revolutionaries and Bonyad-e Pahlavi. See: Akbar Karbassian, 'Islamic Revolution and the Management of the Iranian Economy', *Social Research*, 2000, 621–40.

230 Heritage officials' failure to provide complete and timely documents to prevent delisting was mentioned in the legal debates on the case. See: Judiciary Research Institute-Iran, *Malekiyat-e Khosusi Ya Manfaat-e Omumi?: Naghd-e Raviye Shoabe Divane Edalat-e Edari Piramun-e Ebtal-e Tasmim-e Sazman-e Miras-e Farhangi va Tarikhi Dar Fehrest-e Athar-e Melli [Private Property or Public Interest? A Critique of the Administrative Court Branches' Procedure Regarding the Annulment of the Cultural Heritage Organization's Decision in the Listing of National Monuments]*; Abolfath Shadmehri, Ali E'ta, and Seyyed Sadegh Kashani, Seminar-e Chalesha-ye Hoghughi va Modiriyati-e Hefazat az Miras-e Memari-e Moaser [Seminar on Legal Challenges of the Management and Conservation of Contemporary Architectural Heritage], interview by Research and Planning Centre of Municipality of Tehran and Tehran City Council, Aparat-live, 5 October 2021, BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg, Chair of Urban Management, Fieldnotes.

231 Deputy General of Cultural Heritage, the officials of ICHHTO-Tehran and journalists discussed the case in detail in a radio programme. See: 'Meyda-Ne Azadi Live Rado Program' (Tehran: Rado Farhang, 27 April 2019), BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg, Chair of Urban Management, Fieldnotes.

Inefficient administration, corruption and privatization: A recipe for chaos

From the early-2000s, governmental organizations such as the ICHO gradually ceded their functions to private entities and local governments.²³² The national policy in this period, enshrined in documents such as the Third Five-Year Development Plan of Iran (2000–2004)²³³ and the Budget Law (March 2003–March 2004),²³⁴ emphasized the role of banks as potential investors in tourism and cultural heritage under the framework of cultural development.

Decentralization and privatization led to structural and functional changes in the ICHO. In 2003 and 2006, its areas of authority were expanded to include tourism and handicrafts. Now called the Iranian Cultural Heritage Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO), the organization was moved from the Ministry of Islamic Guidance to the Presidential Office. On the one hand, this increased the flow of money into the organization. On the other, it made the ICHHTO nearly immune to parliamentary control, giving it a reputation for being the government's backyard.²³⁵ The politicized environment of the organization was also reflected in the frequent replacement of its directors. For example, between 2004 and 2013, the organization saw a turnover of six directors, all of whom had served as vice presidents. My interviews suggest that the allocation of key positions at the ICHHTO were political gestures by presidents toward their formal and informal allies. This is also consistently confirmed by political scientists and media reports.²³⁶

232 See: 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]'

233 Ibid.

234 'Ghanoun-e Budjeh Sal-e 1382 Koll-e Keshvar [Budget Law March 2003–March 2004]' (Parliament of Iran, 2003).

235 For instance see: Hekmatollah Mollasalehi, 'Gereh-Ha-Ye Nagoshudeh-Ye Miras [The Unsolved Knots of Cultural Heritage]', *Ettelaat Newspaper*, 16 August 2017, <https://www.ettelaat.com/archives/303389#gsc.tab=0>.

236 See: Ali M Ansari, *Iran under Ahmadinejad: The Politics of Confrontation* (Routledge, 2017).

These frequent, politically driven changes in organizational structure caused disruption to ongoing administrative processes. Informal reports of alleged corruption within the organization became more prevalent during this period, particularly related to the leasing of historical buildings for cultural tourism and the selection of contractors for conservation and reuse projects. Several conservationists I interviewed spoke of a “conservation mafia”, referring to a few consulting firms connected with heritage authorities that were usually awarded project contracts. This was also reflected in an unpublished survey conducted by the University of Tehran that monitored career paths of architectural and urban conservation graduates.²³⁷

During the 1997–2005 administration, the authorities in charge of cultural heritage entered into negotiations with the World Bank, resulting in the latter’s investment in ‘Improving Iran’s Cultural Heritage Organization Capacity in the Protection, Conservation and Social and Economic Exploitation of National Cultural Patrimony’.²³⁸ I interviewed a senior official who was involved in these negotiations who said the original plan was to establish a Cultural Heritage Development Bank to facilitate private sector participation in the preservation and reuse of historic buildings. The Revitalization and Utilization Fund for Historic Sites was set up in service of this aim.²³⁹ After consulting with several conser-

237 ‘Report: Professional Conditions of Graduates of Postgraduate Programs in Conservation and Revitalization of Historic Buildings and Urban Fabrics, First Phase’, Unpublished (Tehran: Research Institute of Art and Culture, University of Tehran, 2018).

238 Anthony Bigio, Rana Amirtahmasebi, and Guido Licciardi, *Culture Counts: Partnership Activities of the World Bank and Italian Development Cooperation on Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development – Report (English)* (Washington, D.C: World Bank Group, 2013), <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/180971468163171229/culture-counts-partnership-activities-of-the-world-bank-and-italian-development-cooperation-on-cultural-heritage-and-sustainable-development-report>.

239 ICHHTO, ‘Asasnameh-Ye Sandough-e Ehya va Bahrebardari Az Banaha va Amaken-e Tarikhi-Farhangi [Statutes of the Revitalisation and Utilisation Fund for Historical Places]’ (2005).

vation experts, the founders of the fund wanted to initiate a paradigm shift in the revitalization and reuse of historic sites based on international standards such as the principles of integrity and authenticity.²⁴⁰ But, from the beginning of President Ahmadinejad's administration in 2005, the fund's activities became increasingly opaque. Another former senior ICHO official²⁴¹ I interviewed spoke openly of massive corruption in the fund, such as favouritism in the selection of investors²⁴² and a flexible interpretation of legal documents. A flexible interpretation of the laws on irreplaceable treasures²⁴³ allowed the misappropriation of revitalization projects by a politicized committee of experts that decided on the leasing of historic sites and the selection of private investors.²⁴⁴ After Ahmadinejad's eight-year presidency, the corruption cases, along with several similar cases at the ICHHTO and other government organizations, were widely discussed in the media, leading Parliament to launch a judicial inquiry.²⁴⁵

240 Revitalisation and Utilization Fund, *Sanad-e Ehya va Bahrebardari Az Amaken Tarikhi va Farhangi [Guidelines for the Revitalisation and Utilization of Historic and Cultural Places]*, second (Tehran: Gang-e Shayegan, 2009).

241 Interviewed by the author on 3 October 2021 in Tehran.

242 Pooya Azadi, 'The Structure of Corruption in Iran', 2020.

243 See Article 83 of the Islamic Republic's Constitution; and Parliament of Iran, 'Ghanoon-e Mohasebat-e Omumi-e Keshvar [The Public Audit Act]'.

244 Online debate by the Director General of Listing and Zoning Office at ICHHTO, Director General of the Iranian Association of Archaeologists, and a heritage journalist organized by the Tourism Research centre of Imam Sadegh University. See: Mostafa Pourali et al., 'Chalesh-Ha va Masael-e Sabt-e Asar-e Farhangi Dar Keshvar [Challenges and Issues of Listing Cultural Properties in Iran]' (Imam Sadiq University, 2021), Fieldnotes.

245 See IRNA, 'Mohseni Ejeie: Hamid Baghaie Bazdasht Shod [Mohseni Ejeie: Hamid Baghaie Was Arrested]', *IRNA*, 6 August 2015, <https://irna.ir/xj9VRT>; Fatemeh Aliasghar, 'Hamid Baghaie Dar Miras-e Farhangi va Dolat-e Ahmadinejad Che Kard? [What Did Hamid Baghaie Do at ICHHTO and Ahmadinejad's Administration?]', *Khabaronline*, 23 February 2017, sec. Jame'e, khabaronline.ir/x7sqm; n. n., 'Asnad-e Fesad-e Hodud-e Nim-Triliard Tomani-e Hamid Baghaie Montasher Shod [Hamid Baghai's Corruption Documents of About Half a Trillion Tomans Were Published]', *Young Journalists Club*, 20 March 2018, <https://www.yjc.news/0oRBRd>.

In August 2021, the Parliamentary Research Centre published a diagnostic study of the legal gaps in identifying irreplaceable treasures that can only be transferred to the private sector with parliamentary approval.²⁴⁶ According to the research, the term ‘irreplaceable treasures’ (or *nafayes*) had not been legally defined. Moreover, the document pointed out that the political and social necessities of the early Revolutionary period, which led to the legislation on *nafayes*, had changed. Therefore, in the absence of a clear legal basis, the expert committee resorted to “experience-based” and “agreement-based” methods, as well as using World Heritage criteria. In order to stop the corruption and irreversible damage to cultural properties caused by the loopholes, the document also proposed a clarification of the term ‘irreplaceable treasures’ and the establishment of an inter-organizational expert committee for the delegation of properties to private bodies.

Apart from the chaotic state of national heritage, World Heritage is often instrumentalized by governments to polish their cultural image and as proof of high achievement. Of all Iranian presidents, Ahmadinejad’s speeches at ceremonies for the listing of Iranian sites on the World Heritage List are the most ironic.²⁴⁷ In a speech on the occasion of the inclusion of the Tabriz Bazaar Complex in the World Heritage List, he described cultural heritage as a “stepping stone to heights of glories” and then advertised his social housing construction project in the province of

246 Deputy of Cultural Studies -Parliament of Iran, ‘Asibshenasi-e Jaigah-e Nafayes Mellī va Monhaser-Befard Dar Nezam-e Ghanoon-Gozari [A Diagnosis of the Place of National and Irreplaceable Treasures in the Legislative System]’ (Parliament of Iran-Research Centre, 2021).

247 His populist use of cultural heritage was distinctive, according to many scholars. See: Ali M Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran*, vol. 40 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Menahem Merhav, ‘Religious Appropriation of National Symbols in Iran: Searching for Cyrus the Great’, *Iranian Studies* 48, no. 6 (2015): 933–48; Ali Mozaffari, ‘Picturing Pasargadae: Visual Representation and the Ambiguities of Heritage in Iran’, *Iranian Studies* 50, no. 4 (2017): 601–34.

East Azerbaijan.²⁴⁸ Or in the last phase of his term, when he had political conflicts with the Supreme Leader, he gave a speech at the ceremony of World Heritage listing of Golestan Palace, saying that preserving cultural heritage would guarantee the nation's future identity and criticizing the Islamic Revolutionary attitude that considered royal buildings as worthless symbols of fallen monarchies.²⁴⁹

Figure 25: Ahmadinejad at the World Heritage listing ceremony for Tabriz Bazaar



© Mehr News Agency, 2010

248 IRNA, 'Dar Marasem-e Jashn-e Sabt-e Jahani Bazar-e Bozorg-e Tabriz [In the Celebration for Tabriz Grand Bazaar Inscription in the World Heritage List]', 31 July 2011, <https://irna.ir/x3fzZW>.

249 Mohammad Barikani, 'Nekoodasht-e Sabt-e Jahani-e Kakh-e Golestan Be Onvan-e Nokhostin Banay-e Sabt-e Jahani-e Paytakht [Celebrating Golestan Palace as the Capital's First World Heritage Site]', *Hamshahrionline*, 7 September 2013, hamshahrionline.ir/x3TFx.

Urban heritage in the public sphere and academia of the 2000s

The early years of Khatami's reformist government opened up the public sphere in Iran. In my interview with the reformist Director of the ICHO,²⁵⁰ Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti Shirazi²⁵¹ described it thus: "Society stepped out of the private space and began to position itself in the public sphere, reclaiming the city and expressing identity". Beheshti Shirazi's firm belief was that this opening up was solely due to the government's reforms, but it is worth noting that the internet played a decisive role in shaping the emerging public sphere. More specifically, new technological possibilities that transformed journalism and the free exchange of information played an instrumental role in the emergence of a network of professionals and citizens who criticized the government. Despite the conservative judiciary's efforts in the 2000s to suppress the relatively relaxed environment for public expression that emerged in Khatami's administration, public criticism persisted within the limitations imposed by strict conditions.²⁵² With the crushing of established reform-oriented newspapers that coincided with the availability of the internet in Iran, blogs and social media provided alternative platforms for repressed voices.²⁵³

Moreover, the number of university students in Iran grew sharply in the 2000s.²⁵⁴ This contributed to the emergence of formal and informal heritage journalism across a range of political alignments. Several universities began enrolling students in their architectural conservation programmes, previously offered only at the ICHHTO HEC. Among them were the University of Tehran, Shahid Beheshti University (former Melli University), University of Art-Tehran, Iran University of Science and

250 His term at the ICHO was between 1997 and 2003.

251 I conducted an interview with him in Tehran on January 7, 2020.

252 Hossein Shahidi, *Journalism in Iran: From Mission to Profession* (London: Routledge, 2007).

253 Marcus Michaelsen, 'The Politics of Online Journalism in Iran', *Social Media in Iran: Politics and Society After*, 2009.

254 Azadi, Mirramezani, and Mesgaran, 'Migration and Brain Drain from Iran'.

Technology, and a growing number of the private Islamic Azad University's branches.²⁵⁵ With the introduction of new university programs in the field and in alignment with the government's decentralization strategy, the HEC, which was founded in 1990, was dissolved.

The unfolding socio-technical assemblage created a space for critical heritage action in Iran. The explicitness of this criticism differed from that of the 1980s, which was carefully and anonymously formulated and often raised by heritage officials. In their blogs, university students, NGOs, and even insiders from government organizations commented on historic sites at risk and allegations of corruption at the ICHHTO.

For example, commenting on the organization's mismanagement in 2005, a former ICHHTO official accused the presidential team of irresponsibility, disregard for expertise, rash and illogical actions, ignoring collective wisdom, populist actions, dogmatic thinking, disregard for the rule of law, monopolization, the illusion of a hypothetical enemy, and a lack of accountability.²⁵⁶ As the ICHHTO was broadly known as the government's backyard, the same blogger supported the idea to transform the organization into a ministry; this would help reduce corruption by placing the organization under parliamentary oversight.²⁵⁷

255 Recently, Imam Sadiq University, affiliated with the Revolutionary powers of the Islamic Republic and recognized as a training ground for the future political elite, has joined the aforementioned universities in introducing research programs focused on national tourism and heritage policies on a large scale. This institution, formerly known as the Center for Management Studies, served as the pre-revolutionary branch of Harvard University in Iran.

256 Ardeshir Oruji, 'Afāt-Ha-Ye Roshd va Tose'e [The Pests of Growth and Development]', *Pajuheshgar-e Miras-e Farhangi, Gardeshgari va Sanay-e Dast [Heritage, Tourism and Crafts Researcher]*, 19 December 2007, <http://oroji.blogfa.com/post/91/>.

257 Ardeshir Oruji, 'Farayand-e Tadvin-e Chanoon-e Tashkil-e Sazman-e Miras-e Farhangi va Gardeshgari va Zaroorat-e Baznegari-e An [The Process of Drafting the Law on the Establishment of the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization and the Need for Its Revision]', *Pajuheshgar-e Miras-e Farhangi, Gardeshgari va Sanay-e Dast [Heritage, Tourism and Crafts Researcher]*, 30 September 2008, <http://oroji.blogfa.com/page/10.aspx>; Ardeshir Oruji, 'Zaroorat-e Tashkil-e Vezarat-e Miras-e Farhangi [The Necessity of Establishing the Ministry of Cultural Her-

Even the prevalence of favouritism in the system was addressed online, with one news outlet for example mocking the fact that the ICHHTO Director's English teacher had been appointed Director of the National Museum.²⁵⁸

In Isfahan, preventing the Jahan-Nama Tower project and the Metro Line-2 from impacting the World Heritage status of Naghsh-e Jahan Square was backed by the active presence of established newspapers and blogs.²⁵⁹ Mozaffari researched a similar case of heritage activism in the 2000s around the construction of the Sivand Dam, which threatened the World Heritage site of Pasargadae in Shiraz.²⁶⁰

itage and Tourism]', *Pajuheshgar-e Miras-e Farhangi, Gardeshgari va Sanay-e Dast [Heritage, Tourism and Crafts Researcher]*, 31 July 2009, <http://oroji.blogfa.com/post/142>. Mohebbali, M. Hassan, another insider at ICHHTO talked about this issue later. See: Mohammad Hassan Mohebbali and Maryam Jalilvand, 'Razha-Ye Magoo-y-e Chehrey-e Mandegar-e Miras-e Farhangi [The Untold Secrets of the Heritage Pioneer about the Cultural Heritage Organisation]', *Seday-e Miras*, 2018, <https://www.sedayemiras.ir/1397/05/29/>.

258 Shahryar, 'Booy-e Eidi [The Scent of Eidi]', *Irangardi Shahriyar Dar Shanbeh*, 3 June 2010, 25.5.2020. The issue was also raised in the official newspapers. See: Mehr News Agency, 'Director of National Museum of Iran Dismissed', *Mehr News Agency*, 7 December 2011, en.mehrnews.com/news/46922/; Aliasghar, 'Hamid Baghaie Dar Miras-e Farhangi va Dolat-e Ahmadinejad Che Kard? [What Did Hamid Baghaie Do at ICHHTO and Ahmadinejad's Administration?]'.

259 Elham Ghasemi and Mojtaba Rafeian, 'Analyzing Conflict of Interest in Large-Scale Participatory Projects with Emphasis on the "Public Private People Partnership" Model (4P) (Case Study: Isfahan Jahannema Citadel Project)', *Motaleate Shahri* 9, no. 34 (2020): 90–104, doi:<https://doi.org/10.34785/1011.2021.887>; Mohammadreza Azimi, 'Amalkard-e Shahr-dari-e Esfahan Dar Tajrobeh-Ye Sakht-e Borg-e Jahan-Nama Dar Harim-e Meidan-e Naghsh-e Jahan [The Role of The Municipality of Isfahan in the Experience of Constructing the Jahan-Nama Tower in Naghsh-e Jahan Square's Buffer Zone]' (Tehran, 22 July 2015), <http://ps://chaharraah.tv/mohammadreza-azimi-a-1394-04-31/>. Also see several posts by Alireza Afshari at khordegiri.blogfa.com and Shahin Sepanta at drshahinsepanta.blogspot.com.

260 Mozaffari, 'Picturing Pasargadae: Visual Representation and the Ambiguities of Heritage in Iran'.

The relative political openness also allowed private academic publishers such as Nashr-e Faza, headed by Falamaki, an active pre-Revolutionary academic and conservation architect, to publish research outside the official academic publishing houses. In 2005, Falamaki published the second edition of his 1978 book on Shiraz, critically reflecting on developments in the field of urban conservation after the 1980s.²⁶¹ In the same year and with the same publishing house, he published a book on the protective zoning of cultural assets, in which he criticized policies on tourism and economic decentralization.²⁶²

Meanwhile, official academic publishing, represented by publishers such as Jahad-e Daneshgahi (University Crusade), Samt, and state university presses, tended to adopt politically neutral and predominantly technical positions. The 2000s saw a wave of technocratic publications authored by bureaucrat-academics with varying political leanings, who held key positions in government and at universities.²⁶³

In general, academic publications of the time, whether written by the aforementioned bureaucrat-academics or not, were optimistic about and consistent with the economic and cultural policies of the National Development Plans and the Twenty-Year Vision Document and viewed disciplinary conservation concepts through the lens of “expediency and objectivity”.²⁶⁴ The publications mainly focused on translating the first

261 Falamaki, *Seiri Dar Tajarob-e Maremmat-e Shari, as Veniz Ta Shiraz [An Essay on Urban Conservation, From Venice to Shiraz]*.

262 M. Mansour Falamaki, *Harimgozari Bar Sarvat-Haye Farhangi-e Iran [Respect of the Cultural Goods of Iran]* (Tehran: Faza Scientific and Cultural Institute, 2005).

263 Sociologist Mohammad Fazeli uses a similar term, ‘sociologist bureaucrat’, to describe sociologists who also work in public administration, such as himself. He argues that while sociologist bureaucrats cannot freely criticize the government, they can nevertheless explain the complexities of the governing process. See: Fazeli, *Iran Bar Labe-Ye Tigh, Coftar-Ha-Ye Jameshenasi-Ye Siyasi va Siyasat-e Omumi [Iran, on the Edge of the Blade Essays on Political Sociology and Public Policy]*.

264 For instance, see: Pirooz Hanachi, *Maremat-e Shahri Dar Baft-Hay-Ye Tarikhi-e Iran [Urban Restoration in Historic Fabrics of Iran]*, 1st ed. (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 2012).

world's technical terminology and best practices with the hope of informing domestic academia,²⁶⁵ policy, and practice.²⁶⁶

Communication technologies facilitated the liberal voicing of opinions, but as the crackdown of the Green Movement²⁶⁷ showed, the same technologies also came in handy for the oppressors.²⁶⁸ Falamaki's response to my question about the effectiveness of the public sphere in preventing ongoing unlawful acts by national and local powers is an apt conclusion to this chapter. He was not as optimistic as Beheshti Shirazi when asked about the public sphere that began to emerge after the wave of reforms, saying that "awareness has grown, but it has never been strong enough to keep up with the economic and ideological forces that have opposed it". Falamaki also pointed out that "complaining would not be a solution. Our journalism and academia cannot solve our problems because they dare not name the root causes".²⁶⁹

265 M. Mansour Falamaki, *Nosazi va behsazi-e shahri [Urban improvement and renewal]* (Tehran: SAMT, 2013).

266 Seyyed Mohsen Habibi and Malihe Maghsoodi, *Urban Restoration* (Tehran: University of Tehran, 2002); Hossein Kalantari and Ahmad Pourahmad, *Fonun va Tajarob-e Barnamehrizi-e Maremat-e Baft-e Tarikhi-e Shahrha [Techniques and Experiences in Renovation Planning of Historical Area of Cities]* (Tehran: Jahad-e Daneshgahi, 2005); Hanachi et al., *Barresi-e Tatbighi-e Tajarob Maremat-e Shahri Dar Jahan va Iran, Ba Negahi Vijeh Be Baft-e Yazd [A Comparative Study Of Urban Preservation Experiences In The World And In Iran, With A Special Focus On The City Of Yazd]*; Jukka Jokilehto, *Tarikh-e Hefazat-e Memari [History of Architectural Conservation]*, trans. M. Hassan Talebian and Khashayar Bahari (Tehran: Rozaneh, 2008).

267 The political movement that sprung up in Iran after the June 2009 presidential election that led to Ahmadinejad's second term in office.

268 Saeid Golkar, 'Liberation or Suppression Technologies? The Internet, the Green Movement and the Regime in Iran.', *International Journal of Emerging Technologies & Society* 9, no. 1 (2011).

269 On January 9, 2020, I conducted an interview with him at his office in Tehran.