Beautiful Rotten Tehran

Multi-Sensory Artistic Research on Contemporary Urban Design in Tehran (Pardis Phase 11)

Ali Mousavi
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Ali Mousavi
Supervising professor
Professor. Mira Kallio-Tavin

Preliminary examiners
Professor. Yasser Elsheshtawy, Columbia University, United States.
Professor. Pamela Karimi, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, United States.

Opponent
Professor. Pamela Karimi, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, United States.
Abstract

Beautiful Rotten Tehran is a multi-sensorial enquiry into a specific location close to the city of Tehran, Iran, called Pardis Phase 11. This is accomplished by employing visual and acoustemological methodologies as research tools for observing and analysing architecture and urban design. In this regard, this research is an attempt to observe, study and analyse the process of urbanisation in Iran, specifically the housing construction in the Pardis Phase 11 suburbs of Tehran. The interest in the sensory dimensions of Pardis Phase 11 serves as the starting point for this multi-sensory research. The project employs sensorial methodologies such as acoustemology and cartography to investigate the area and urban transformations caused by concepts such as 'modernisation', 'development', 'progress' and 'globalisation'. The work evolves through a large collection of media content in the form of field recordings, photographs and collages made at the Pardis Phase 11 site.

The main objectives of the research are a) to contribute towards critical spatial practices that are operating in the spaces between artistic research and urban design, and b) gain new knowledge and understanding of the social aspects and sensory experience of urban and built form (placemaking) in Tehran, Pardis Phase 11. In this research I offer Critical Regionalism as a possible solution to the issues related to Pardis Phase 11 and the research questions. A historical study is also presented to have a better understanding of past values. I also create comparative images of Before, Now and the Future, which resonates with the principles of Critical Regionalism. A chapter on nature embarks on the enormous task of dismantling the concept of nature in the context of urban space. In doing so, I have chosen a religious perspective as the point of departure, as religion is an ancient social concept that has been influential in most societies. Then, after dismantling the religious and philosophical concept of nature, I intend to construct a foundation for understanding urban space in continuation and in relation to the concept of nature. These are necessary steps to create a context for analysing, interpreting and understanding the changes happening in the city of Tehran, in particular the project of Pardis Phase 11.

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Beautiful Rotten Tehran

Multi-Sensory Artistic Research on Contemporary Urban Design in Tehran (Pardis Phase 11)

by

Ali Mousavi

A Doctoral Thesis submitted to the School of Art, Design and Architecture Aalto University, Finland

Supervisor
Professor Mira Helena Kallio-Tavin
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Abstract

*Beautiful Rotten Tehran* is a multi-sensorial enquiry into a specific location close to the city of Tehran, Iran, called *Pardis Phase 11*. This is accomplished by employing visual and acoustemological methodologies as research tools for observing and analysing architecture and urban design. In this regard, this research is an attempt to observe, study and analyse the process of urbanisation in Iran, specifically the housing construction in the *Pardis Phase 11* suburbs of Tehran. The interest in the sensory dimensions of *Pardis Phase 11* serves as the starting point for this multi-sensory research. The project employs sensorial methodologies such as acoustemology and cartography to investigate the area and urban transformations caused by concepts such as ‘modernisation’, ‘development’, ‘progress’ and ‘globalisation’. The work evolves through a large collection of media content in the form of field recordings, photographs and collages made at the *Pardis Phase 11* site.

The main objectives of the research are a) to contribute towards critical spatial practices that are operating in the spaces between artistic research and urban design, and b) gain new knowledge and understanding of the social aspects and sensory experience of urban and built form (placemaking) in Tehran, *Pardis Phase 11*. In this research I offer Critical Regionalism as a possible solution to the issues related to *Pardis Phase 11* and the research questions. A historical study is also presented to have a better understanding of past values. I also create comparative images of Before, Now and the Future, which resonates with the principles of Critical Regionalism. A chapter on nature embarks on the enormous task of dismantling the concept of nature in the context of urban space. In doing so, I have chosen a religious perspective as the point of departure, as religion is an ancient social concept that has been influential in most societies. Then, after dismantling the religious and philosophical concept of nature, I intend to construct a foundation for understanding urban space in continuation and in relation to the concept of nature. These are necessary steps to create a context for analysing, interpreting and understanding the changes happening in the city of Tehran, in particular the project of *Pardis Phase 11*. 
In the next chapter of this multi-sensorial research project, a set of empirical findings are presented through my own observation of the area of *Pardis Phase 11*. What follows are my conversations with three residents of *Pardis Phase 11* to gain a better understanding of everyday life in that particular location. The conversations have been structured more like storytelling as part of a multi-sensorial methodology to arouse the imagination and emotions of the reader. In the end, a conclusion is presented not as an endpoint, but rather as an open question or unfinished chapter that can be taken up in further research in the future. And finally, in the conclusion, I set out not only to find answers to some of the research questions but also to obtain a better understanding of the issues and problems presented in this research.
Introduction

An Overview

Cities are the product of human activity and the result of their encounter with nature. Consequently, the morphology of spaces and the structure of built forms in the city can be viewed as an expression of the values of a society. Additionally, urban environment and development can be understood as an ideological construction. Human beings perceive and experience everything in their surroundings through their senses. Although each individual’s sensory experience and meaning-making are very much subjective, this sensing is also social.\(^1\) It is social in the sense that humans as members of society interact with each other, and this interaction is mediated through the senses. Therefore, ideas about how to change and shape nature and how to make meaning of it through the senses are influenced by social factors. Thus, different societies evaluate and give meanings to experiences of social factors in different ways. For instance, the experience of a place involves a cognitive process, which has a relationship with the history, myths, stories and representation of that particular place in different cultural forms. As urban planner Kevin Lynch states:

> Cognition is an individual process, but its concepts are social creations. We learn to see as we communicate with other people. The most interesting unit of study for environmental cognition may therefore be small, intimate, social groups who are learning to see together, exchanging their feelings, values, categories, memories, hopes, and observations, as they go about their everyday affairs.\(^2\)

Here Lynch is implying that, although the process of learning about one’s surroundings is an individual endeavour, by sharing and exchanging feelings, memories, hopes and observations people become more conscious about their sensory experience of their living environment, history and society. What I mean here is that, as a researcher, I go through this individual process of cognition and learning; consequently, by sharing my experience and observation with the reader, they can also have a sense experience of the living environment of *Pardis*

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\(^1\) Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Phase 11. Additionally, exchange and reflection on the living environment and urban development become important. Urban development and restructuring of the city not only alter the physical shape and form (or economic aspects) of the landscape, but also influence the experience of the living environment of its inhabitants; therefore, it becomes a social and political sensory experience.³

My focus in this multi-sensory artistic research is on the relationship between human beings and the natural and built environment. Also, to fully understand this relationship, I suggest that an interdisciplinary approach is required, in which a collaboration between decision/policy makers, architects, planners, people and artists ought to be embraced. In this regard, the of in the thesis are formed by different disciplines that are intertwined while addressing the same issue. Each chapter reflects the desire to understand the relationship between human experience and behaviour and the socio-physical environment. The first chapter will look at national culture and universalisation, exploring the concepts of local/global, tradition/modernity and progress.⁴ This involves a search for the birth of Western modernity and capitalism and their historical roots. Next, I explore the concept of progress in Islam. The justification for this comparison is the idea that Western modernity is about progress: moving away from tradition, becoming new and modern. Additionally, ideas of progress and modernity have a tendency to become universalised. As a result of this push for universalisation, there has been a tension between tradition and modernity, and between locality and globality. Therefore, a particular scenario is presented in which two extreme forces are at play and pitted against each other: tradition and modernity. In this regard, Chapter One is the first layer of paint on the canvas, which prepares the foundation for research on the two extremes of tradition and modernity. Furthermore, I argue that the tension between these two poles of West/Modernity and East/Tradition is embedded in urban transformation and architectural projects in Tehran. This has created a contradictory space, which could be seen as a 'glocalised' issue.⁵ Glocalisation is the occurrence of both universalisation and localisation at the same time, and can be seen in different aspects of society such as the social, political and economic systems.⁶


⁴ Some of these concepts will be translated into Farsi in this thesis, as they were imported into the Iranian intellectual landscape and vocabulary, which also contributed to many disputes and much upheaval.

⁵ Glocalisation, a combination of the two terms globalisation and localisation, was first used by Japanese economists and later popularised by the sociologist Roland Robertson.

In the second chapter, ideas about nature from the three standpoints of Christianity, Islam and modernity will be looked at. In this chapter, general understandings of nature will be introduced. My initial aim was to only look at the modern concept of nature, which also coincides with the birth of capitalism and the modernism movement in the arts. However, after careful consideration, it became clear that, firstly, this would only represent an isolated study of nature and also would be ignoring concepts such as history, progress, evolution and tradition. All of these are embedded in the modern concept of nature and so are necessary to grasp the concepts of modernity and progress. Historical regression is needed to find the meaning of nature before its scientific, technological and industrial shaping by human beings. Secondly, since this research is concerned with changes in the shape and form of the city, its history and its sensory experience of place, it felt important to look at the relationship between humans and their environment, i.e., nature.

Nature is the primary raw material for constructing human societies and cities. ‘Human beings change the land around them in a way and on a scale matched, for the most part, by no other animal’. The transformation of the land and the cities created are a reflection of human beings' technological ability, culture, society, hopes and dreams. Therefore, it can be said that the way a society or city is shaped is influenced by an ideological and philosophical view of nature. I search for the meaning of nature to make sense of the current condition of the built environment and experience of place.

Lastly, the idea of going back to the religious and philosophical meaning of nature is also linked with the methodology that is being employed for this research, which is a Lefebvreian regression–progression method that will be discussed in depth in the literature review. Regression–progression can be seen as a play or movement that consists of three stages. The first stage of the regression–progression method is about description and observation based on experience and general theory. In the second stage, there is an analytical and regression move; this involves an analysis of what is, the existing reality. Then we move on to a comparison with other existing realities. This allows for solid in-depth reflection and avoids the danger of making vague statements and assumptions. The third stage is historical: the study of what was and how it changed into what is. This stage looks at the evolution of structures and concepts—in other words, returning to the past and rooted sources in an attempt to trace what it has become.

The relevance of this method has also been considered via sound recordings from the old part of the city of Tehran, and also in the new housing area of Pardis Phase 11. Sensorial research in the old part of the city plays the role of regression, and the project of Pardis Phase 11 is an attempt to understand what

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7 Malpas, 1999.
has become and plays the role of progression. Therefore, the audio recordings act as a bridge between the past and now. Thus, the chapter on nature functions within this dialectical interplay, to give a better understanding of urban space and built environment. The chapter explains how nature has been perceived by different groups of people—in particular, in Christianity, Islam and further in modern times. This also provides a philosophical foundation for the discussion of urban development, the use of space, the making of the city and the sense of place.

The following chapter is a discussion of urban space. It seems a natural progression to explore the concept of space after reflection on ideas of nature. The focus in this artistic research is on the relationship between physical and social aspects of space, as it ‘offers a useful initial guide for an investigation of lived experience’. The analysis of form and comparison to earlier civilisations and cities serves different interrelated roles in this thesis: a) it will demonstrate an early model of cities' shape and how natural and man-made urban determinants played an important role in the evolution of their urban form; b) the effect of topography and climate will be considered as a main factor of the street and urban system and the need for creating courtyard houses; and c) this historical trajectory helps us to understand the traditional way of organising West Asian cities in comparison to the inadequacies of Western modern urban planning. Additionally, I believe that the social concept of space offers a context within which subjective sensory experience can produce an understanding that can be related to human behaviour and the external characteristics of the environment.

However, before the discussion of social space, there will be a brief review of some of the debates around the concept of space in philosophy, mathematics and physics, which will offer a better understanding of the different dimensions of space. As mentioned above, it is the social aspect of space that is under investigation here, as social space is the context of everyday lived experience. This is the realm of understanding individuals within place; therefore, the relationship between space and place is examined in order to represent a multi-sensory experience of place (Pardis Phase 11).

Discussion of Multi-Sensory Methodologies

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8 Anne Buttimer, ‘Social Space and the Planning of Residential Area’, in Human Experience of Space and Place, ed. by Anne Buttimer and David Seamon (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980).
This doctoral thesis is accompanied by an artistic project that employs sensory methodologies such as sound recording, listening, smell, mapping and collaging as primary tools of investigation. It should be noted that debates about the identity of art and artistic research, art as research, practice-based research, practice-led research and research-led-practice have mostly been taking place at art universities and art education institutions of higher education for a long time now. The core debates and even the categorisation of definition could be linked to artists or creative practitioners trying to defend their practices. Moreover, these discussions can be looked at from two perspectives, as German Toro-Perez (2010) observes: ‘this discussion has two aspects: one ontological and one political. The political aspect concerns the question of the validity of historically developed hierarchies in science reflected in education and research structures, which is ultimately also a question of resource distribution’.

There is a conflict between these two aspects, observed by art theoretician Henk Borgdorff as an ‘uneasy relationship between artistic research and the academic world’. For Borgdorff, ‘artistic research is in danger of becoming isolated from the settings in which society has institutionalised thinking, reflection and research’. However, debates around the validity of research in the domain of art will not be dealt with here as they are beyond the scope of this research. What is of interest to me are the characteristics embedded in artistic research—one of which, as Borgdorff observes, is that ‘artistic research seeks to convey and communicate content that is enclosed in aesthetic experience, enacted in creative practices and embodied in artistic products’.

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9 Corina Caduff, Fiona Siegenthaler and Tan Wälchli, eds., *Art and Artistic Research* (Zurich: Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess AG, 2010).


13 Ibid.

What this implies is that the creative process in which the artist–researcher is involved plays an important role in the totality of the research project. Another distinguishing feature of this type of research is the artistic experience and the encounter with the subject under research. Borgdorff sees this experiential element as something that cannot be efficiently expressed through linguistic discourse.\(^{15}\) Thus, the artistic, sensuous experience plays an important role in the research process. Moreover, it is the artistic activity that allows for this sensuous experience, which enables one to perceive the world and make sense of it. The multi-sensory methodology in this research operates within this realm and intends to contribute to the discourse on artistic research. The objective is to gain new understanding of the social aspects and sensory experience of urban and built forms (placemaking) in Tehran, the capital city of Iran. The research pursues an interdisciplinary approach between artistic practice and theoretical research in contemporary architecture and city planning.

It has always seemed to me that art and architecture have the potential for social change and improving the existing social order. They can be emancipatory, helping people find their identities, promoting social justice and even in small ways changing the world we live in. Therefore, it would be sufficient to say that artists and architects engage in innovation and creativity hoping to articulate their dreams and construct a better future for the good of their communities. The living environment and places in which humans spend their lives tell a story about who they are, and show our vision of the future. I am implying here that art and architecture (urban planning) are social practices that are not separate from the rest of social life.

In fact, throughout the history of modern art, many artists and moments have reflected the desire for social change and a break with institutions related to art and architecture. Will Bradley and Charles Esche remind us:

\(^{15}\) Borgdorff, ‘The Production of Knowledge’. 
The range of action that delimited and defined the role of the artist in European society changed dramatically during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The uneven rise of capitalism, urbanism, secularism, republicanism and democratic citizenship, and the concomitant complex and diverse remaking of social mores and responsibilities had far-reaching effects.\textsuperscript{16}

This means that artists can engage with many contemporary issues, questioning their own role and moving outside their own specific institutions to have a wider context in society. One prominent artist who had a political role in the Paris Commune was Gustave Courbet. He was elected as the president of the Arts Commission during the revolutionary Paris Commune.\textsuperscript{17} The student-run art academy, which involved artists in running the galleries and museums and the abolition of art prizes by the state, showed the importance of art in political struggle as an embodiment of personal truth.\textsuperscript{18} Now, to think of Courbet’s view on art and his artistic practice as what we know today as ‘socially engaged art’, ‘participatory art’ or ‘art activism’ would perhaps be an overstatement. But it would be fair to say that Courbet established a model of artistic practice that is linked with the wider social context.

However, the far-reaching effects that Bradley (2007) is addressing as a result of the rise of capitalism, urbanism and secularisation not only affected European societies. Rather, these movements travelled all over the globe. The effect of the above concepts will be looked at in this research. I intend to investigate the changes to the fabric of the city of Tehran and contemporary issues of urban design and planning through artistic research.

In this regard, in this doctoral research I look at the effect of the uneven rise of capitalism and urbanism in post-revolution Iran as one way of thinking about the signs of ‘global architecture culture’ in the city of Tehran. Additionally, the dissertation looks at the tension between traditionalism, which in Farsi translates as \textit{Sonnat}, and modernity, which translates as \textit{Tajadod}, and its effect

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} ‘Musée d’Orsay: Courbet and the Commune’ \texttt{<https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/events/exhibitions-in-the-museums/exhibitions-in-the-musee-dorsay-more/article/courbet-at-la-commune-4001.html?tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=649&cHash=6db5b02113> [accessed 31 December 2020].}
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Bradley and Esche, p. 13.
\end{itemize}
on urban form and built form in the city of Tehran, an ancient simple village that has been affected by capitalism and urbanisation. It is a place that is caught between globalisation and locality.

It is important to note that this research is undertaken from an artistic point of view, analysing urban form and housing. I position and characterise it as artistic research, because on the one hand, it primarily focuses on understanding concepts and methods in the practices of making and framing everyday life in urban and built form within the city; and, on the other hand, applies sensory art methodologies as another set of methods and concepts. As a result, both elements function as forms of research.

Cities play an important role in producing sensory environments and human experiences. Each city produces its own particular visual and audio stimuli that contribute to the sensory lives and experiences of its inhabitants. As Merleau-Ponty notes, 'sense experience is vital communication with the world, which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life. It is to it that the perceived object and perceiving subject owe their thickness.' It is essential to understand how the subject’s senses play a role in understanding and interpreting the object of the city. In other words, our senses encounter the city and perceive the objects within our surroundings. Subsequently, through the rational faculty, we comprehend and make sense of what is perceived and give meaning to it.

Consequently, the preliminary approach for my research is an aesthetic point of view. More precisely, the aesthetic of Alexander Baumgarten, which is the celebration of the potential for epistemological applicability of our sense perceptions. Hammermeister observes that 'Baumgarten’s aesthetics refers to a theory of sensibility as a gnoseological faculty, that is, a faculty that produces a certain type of knowledge' and, in a more Kantian way, to see ‘aesthetic’ as a

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It is in this context that my artistic research investigates urban landscape and housing/place, to apply reflective judgement and epistemological capacity as crucial elements of developing the ability to employ our faculties of sensibility, understanding and reason in everyday life. In other words, the dissertation plays the role of rational faculty and the artistic project plays the role of the faculty of the senses. In the following section, I describe the artistic project in more detail. Each of the artistic mediums used are dialogical and analytically related, so they complement one another. Therefore, artistic production feeds the written component of the dissertation; they are intertwined.

On Acoustemological and Cartographical Investigation

The starting point for this research project is an interest in the sensory dimensions of city life in Tehran. As mentioned above, the artistic production is one part of the research, which consists of acoustemological investigations and a sound diary of Tehran, which embraces sensorial methodologies that consist of the use of acoustemology and cartography. The second part is a written dissertation, which intends to examine the city’s urban transformation by the forces of global capitalism. It is a critique of how global capitalism has affected the urban form and planning in the city of Tehran. The work develops through an extensive collection of media content in the form of field recordings, GPS mapping, photographs, photo collages, video recordings and interviews. These materials were made at a specific location in East Tehran known as Pardis Phase 11. The project intends to create a discursive sensory setting and multi-sensory experience. The materials presented in this research activate different sensory

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22 Ibid.
modes for viewers, listeners and readers, in order to create a contemplative and in-depth reflection on the land transformed into an urban setting.

Acoustemology is a combination of two words, ‘acoustic’ and ‘epistemology’, and refers to a sonic experience as a way of knowing. The term was coined by Steven Feld in 1992. Feld’s research and observations among the Kaluli tribe in Papua New Guinea made him realise that sound was ‘central to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth’. My interest in acoustemology was sparked by its interdisciplinary capacity: it can be applied in the context of urban and architecture as an analytical tool for studying urban experience. As my project, Sound Diary: #Tehran, focuses on sensory methodology, the acoustemological approach was a deliberate choice to engage with sound as a way of knowing and experiencing everyday life via built forms.

Recorded sound in itself is not the only important aspect here. In fact, the primary emphasis is on listening. It is part of the sensory methodology used in this project as a form of artistic experience and observation. Therefore, recorded sounds are an attempt to recreate that experience and the possibility of encountering other worlds. As Rice notes, ‘acoustemology points to the existence of alternative ways of encountering the world and possibility of hearing other realities’.

Cartography is the other element of this project, which involved walking and mapping in the city of Tehran. Originally, cartography was the study and practice of making maps. It is an ancient practice that dates back to prehistoric times for allocating hunting and fishing areas. For instance, the Babylonians (2300 BCE) created geographical images and maps. According to the British Cartographic Society, cartography is the combination of art, science and the

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25 Ibid.
technology of mapmaking.\textsuperscript{26} Cartography builds on the notion that reality can be communicated via spatial data and information.\textsuperscript{27} Mapping is a primary part of my investigation, serving as a tool to highlight ‘psycho-geographical’ walking in Tehran.\textsuperscript{28} GPS and map-making are employed as a method for drawing on the physical fabric of the city. By using a GPS device, I am tracing the action of my body by marking the Earth in a particular place. Furthermore, cartography and mapping are applied here as a social inquiry in relation to urban design configuration. The emphasis is on bringing the spatial logic of this kind of planning to the foreground. Walking, in this sense, becomes a crucial way to embody the experience of opening up to a new perspective to make sense of urban situations. Ian Sinclair, in his book \textit{Lights Out for the Territory}, contends:

> Walking is the best way to explore and exploit the city; the changes, shifts, breaks in the cloud helmet, movement of light on water. Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode, trampling asphalted earth in alert reverie, allowing the fiction of an underlying pattern to assert itself. To the non-bullshit materialist, this sounds suspiciously like \textit{fin de siècle} decadence, a poetic of entropy, but the born-again flaneur is a stubborn creature, less interested in texture and fabric, eavesdropping on philosophical conversation pieces, than in noticing everything.\textsuperscript{29}

A sensory understanding of the city becomes possible by opening up to and engaging sensorial elements through the mind’s cognitive capacity. My intention in this thesis has been to create a narrative about the transformation of life and our living environment by staying close to sound and the act of listening. Applying an acoustic framework, I am drawn to the question of how our senses can play an important role in raising political questions. By this I mean that the result of sense experiences produced through artistic research provides the possibility of formulating new forms. This would enable perceivers to see the world as it is or perhaps as it ought to be. The questions of how ‘it is’ and how ‘it ought to be’ would prepare the ground for political awareness. This can be taken as a starting point to see how policy makers and decision makers can have an

\textsuperscript{26} https://www.cartography.org.uk/becoming-a-cartographer

\textsuperscript{27} https://www.britannica.com/science/cartography


effect on the forms of our shared environment and living spaces. My artistic practice, which is intertwined with this research, is concerned with listening and sound as forms of sensory perception activated in built environments and housing architecture. To remain in one location; to notice the passing of hours, minutes and seconds; to observe the changing light of a place and listen.

For me, the act of listening and recording is a particular way of engaging with a place and its specific character. It somehow makes me concentrate on my surroundings and become an acute observer to understand the physical world. Therefore, the five components of this project—A) walking, B) listening, C) recording sound, D) mapping and E) photo collage—are essentially a creative way of interacting with the built environment and city. The collages represent images of the past and present of the Iranian landscape, and are a visual dichotomy of two extreme poles of tradition and modernity. The first layers are images of the past Iranian landscape, depicting people and cities that are surrounded by trees, meadows of wildflowers and winding streams. Additionally, they show an image of a poetic way of life that seems to be in harmony with its environment.

These are images that have been collected and scanned from books, reflecting a past that can now be seen only in historical books. The second layers, which are photographs taken from *Pardis Phase 11*, have been overlaid on these images with the intention of hiding and covering most of the original images. The purpose of this work is as a conflictual imposition of an external phenomenon on another existing internal reality. The external imposition here mirrors how Western modern design and planning has been imposed on another way of life. Moreover, these works are the result of reading and studying everyday life and reality, and are visual and auditory forms of knowledge. However, the four components of this project blur the borders between representation of and reflection on the object of study, which is the city. For me, the city is the quintessential example of human history in the making, imagination of future life, and ultimately our ideas of social justice. Moreover, the shape and construction of cities have an enormous effect on the daily lives of those who live and work in them across the whole planet.
It might not be an exaggeration to say that the majority of people are born and die in cities. It has been estimated that seventy-five percent (75%) of the global population is expected to live in megacities by 2050. This might be because of the rapid urbanisation of all regions. The magnitude of these urban transformations is daunting and difficult to grasp. But what does this rapid pace of urbanisation mean in terms of the environmental impact on our everyday life? What does this created space mean for our social relationships and behaviour? What do the built form and urban design mean in regard to democracy or liberation? These are the questions that underpin my research on how we think about our cities.

As Sennett remarks, ‘A city isn’t just a place to live, to shop and to go out. It’s a place that implicates how one derives one’s ethics, how one develops a sense of justice, how one learns to talk with and learn from people who are unlike oneself, which is how a human being becomes human’. In our everyday life, we inhabit cities, buildings, streets and rooms. Therefore, the decisions made by designers and architects will have a direct effect on our social behaviours and our identities. As Dovey explains, ‘the built environment reflects identities, differences, and struggles of gender, class, race, culture, and age. It shows the interest of people in empowerment and freedom, the interest of the state in the social order, and in the private corporate interest in stimulating consumption’. Additionally, through architecture and urban design, particular forms, new social orders and experiences of space come to existence. What this might mean is that our subjectivity is conditioned according to the interests of those who are in control of city planning and urban design. Through architecture, we frame and give a particular shape and design to space.

Houses, offices and factories are used everyday. As much as these built environments are planned, designed and shaped, they also shape and influence the actions and behaviours of those who live in or use them. The built

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31 Ibid.


environment can influence the sense of belonging of those who live and work in it. Alternatively, it might help to construct or allow one to relate to a historical/collective identity and memory. It can also create a relationship between individuals and their notion of home and the city they live in. For instance, *You and I in Flux* (2006–2007) is a photographic project in three parts created by Ania Dabrowska. In this project, Dabrowska explores how the notion of home influences a sense of belonging and its impact on the construction of our identity.34

Another relevant artistic project is *A Line Is There to Be Broken*, which originated in June 2008. This photographic project was put together by three artists: Tristan Fennell, David Kendall and Gesche Wurfel. This project was in the form of an exhibition and workshops, which explored spatial and social disruptions in urban landscapes and the transformation of ‘places’ and ‘space’ in global cities.35 Part of the focus in *A Line Is There to Be Broken* was on the effects of spatial and architectural development of the 2012 Olympic sites in London, and how regeneration and development processes conflict with local needs.36 In relation to the transformation of ‘places’ and ‘space’ in global cities, their project asked the question: what links the global cities of London, Tokyo and Doha In other words, ‘*A Line Is There to Be Broken* is a proposal that links these cities together and questions social-governmental policies, spatial and economic developments, and initiatives in cities throughout the world’.37

What these global cities share is the transformation of places and space as a metaphor and sign of modernity, and being part of a global consumer culture. In most mega-cities, social–governmental policies, and spatial and economic developments, are focused on the same initiatives. It has been suggested that


35 https://www.openvizor.com/a-line-is-there-to-be-broken

36 Naik and Oldfield, pp. 62–63.

37 Naik and Oldfield, p. 62.
global consumer culture (policies, initiatives and interests) ‘refers to the increasing growth of tourism, international migration and the homogenization of commodity consumption generally associated with globalisation’. It should be noted that there are other dimensions that can be associated with global consumer culture. For instance, as King observes:

Townscapes, buildscapes and landscapes, produced by the common adaptation of ideas, techniques, standards, design and ideologies and the worldwide diffusion of information, images, professional cultures and subcultures (of architecture, city planning, urban design, conservation), and supported by international capital flows.

There are numerous mega urban projects taking place in Asia and Global South countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Thailand, China and Iran. In fact, between 2017 and 2020 I travelled to Dubai, Thailand and Iran. From my own observation and discussions with colleagues and local people, it became clear to me that all these countries can be associated with global consumer culture. This might mean planning and development initiatives that are based on the foundation and adaptation of ideas, design and ideologies that King is referring to above. Perhaps the shopping mall, tall office towers and suburban housing can also be included amongst global development-type initiatives.

The key characteristic of global consumerist culture is its relationship with the worldwide expansion of market capitalism. Let us take two examples of common global developments: mega shopping malls and suburban housing projects, that most of these global cities share. As I am aiming to show in this artistic research, Iran also follows the same pattern. Furthermore, perhaps it can be said that construction projects are a form of discourse. For Dovey, any form of discourse is structured and represented according to the interest of the state. What I mean here by ‘global capitalism’ is mainly an emphasis on a ‘global architectural culture’—the way a particular culture and way of organising life imposes itself on other cultures and tries to produce a universal cultural form and discourse.

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39 Ibid, p. 32.
40 Dovey, p. 33.
There is traffic congestion in most cities around the world, and there are the rural poor and farmers that now live in shantytowns not far from massive construction sites. The old city boundaries have moved into once remote suburban areas, and these suburbs have become major urban settings themselves. This process of urbanisation and capital accumulation knows neither east nor west. In this regard, a shopping mall in London can be set alongside a shopping mall in Tehran without any dis-familiarity. In fact, there is an increasing loss of authenticity and identity in construction and housing architecture in contemporary Iranian cities, similar to elsewhere. The emergence of huge complex shopping malls and massive Western-style tower blocks has made Iranian cities indistinguishable from other places.

It is crucial for this artistic research project to make a critical inquiry into Iran’s current housing architecture and urban design. This doctoral thesis attempts to play this critical role in relation to contemporary urban design, which seems to have been greatly influenced by Western codes of architectural design. Iranian cities have a rich history of urban planning and architectural tradition. It had a tradition and history of place-making that had been in harmony with its topology and the geographical conditions particular to that region. However, it seems to have lost its identity and interest in reviving and looking back at some valuable aspects of that tradition, and instead has adopted other global cities’ characteristics.

As L. Carl Brown reminds us:

The old city boundaries merge imperceptively into suburbs which are themselves major urban agglomerations in Cairo as well as in London and Paris. The mushroom city knows no East or West. Casablanca in this regard may be set alongside Houston. In Aleppo and Alexandria just as in Glasgow and Marseilles, substantial and architecturally interesting quarters are now so antiquated that the bleak prospect is either destruction and urban renewal or restoration at a forbiddingly high unit cost.41

What L. Carl Brown is indicating is that a distinctive place experience with a particular history becomes a non-place and characterless. It is in this context that I intend to investigate the production of Iranian urban form and housing architecture—the very materiality, the physical, spatial and symbolic elements that buildings and architecture represent. Therefore, the object of this dissertation is to unravel the theoretical logic that is influencing the restructuring of Iranian cities, mainly Tehran. Moreover, I look at the impact of the Modern movement on architecture, city planning, housing architecture and urban form in Iranian cities, in particular Tehran. The explicit questions that underpin this research are as follows:

- In what ways has Tehran’s city planning and housing architecture been successful in overcoming the tensions between tradition and modernity, locality and globalisation?
- What can we find in the tradition and history of Iran’s and particularly Tehran’s urban planning that would help us understand the present moment of urban design and planning and point towards the future?
- What sensory experiences of everyday life are likely to be perceived in a city and built environment caught between locality and globalisation?

This research intends to provide a context in which to see the bigger picture of the contemporary city. The case study is the capital of Iran, Tehran. It seems essential to look at the historical stages of the city’s transformation, offering an account of these transformations in Iranian society and with specific reference to its capital city. I set out to understand these changes in the context of urban socio-spatial change by sensory investigation of the city, asking how Tehran’s particular urban form developed to be what it is today. The case study of Tehran is used to demonstrate the tensions and contradictions of modernity and global capitalism through sensory experience of the place. ‘Tehran’s modern history is full of debate about modernity, whether to accept it or reject it’.42

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The concept of Western modernity, when it reached Iranian society, took different forms and functions than in the West. It seems that, throughout the history of modern Iran, each dynasty or regime of the government appropriated Western ideals according to its interests and desires. They have adopted some aspects and disregarded other principles; ‘in a sense, the history of the last 150 years in Iran has been permeated by the confrontation between the West, Modernization, Modernity (Tajadod) on the one hand, and the East, Nationalism, and tradition (Sonnat) on the other hand’.\textsuperscript{43} This created a hybrid and contradictory version of modernity. The adaptation of Western modernity and its conflict with traditionalism became a challenge in many different fields of Iranian society. As will be elaborated on in this research, the impact of this confrontation on Iranian cities and housing architecture would have consequences up to the present time.

The case study of Tehran is a prime example of this confrontation through encounters that undermined or disregarded the traditional fabric of the city. Further analysis of the history of modernity and revolutions in Iran is beyond the scope of this research. What concerns me here is the effect of modernity in the context of urban planning and housing architecture. However, I do think it is necessary to find the roots of modernity in order to understand the emergence of concepts such as rational planning and modern ideas of city design. Therefore, in the following sections I will provide a brief history of modernity/enlightenment in the Occidental/European context versus the Oriental/Eastern context.

This research is an ideological consideration of the meaning of the production of space and its experience in the everyday life of Tehran. It also attempts to explore ‘critical spatial practice’, work that transgresses the limits of art and architecture and engages with both the social and aesthetic, the public and private. Furthermore, the main concern here is with urban form in the city. The main focus is on places of transition, whose past has a strong impact and whose future is uncertain. The search for evidence in different cities and studies about

Spatial urban change in the era of global capitalism is an attempt to generate discussion about new concepts of sustainable life and the sustainable city in sync with its surroundings in a changing society and environment.

There should be interactions among architects, urbanists and artists, coming together for multidisciplinary research and breaking away from their professional isolation. This is opposed to ‘architectural space understood as the preserve of a particular profession within the established social division of labour’. Therefore, the attempt is to derive from this a critique of urban design, a critical reflection on the general condition of modernity. Research on the process of urbanisation creates space for the possibilities of transforming social life, moving away from a global and rational instrumentalisation of all aspects of life.

The main argument of this dissertation is to be developed around the question of how global capitalism has affected the production of urban space, not only in European societies but in particular non-European countries too. This widespread effect, I argue, has affected the production of urban space even in a religious and anti-capitalist society such as Iran’s, which is the case study of this research. It seems that this widespread effect of urban planning has been transformed into an ideology. Perhaps it can also be said that this ideology is colonising urban form and built form everywhere.

Throughout this research, it may seem that I favour traditional housing architecture or urban design (if it can be called traditional). I feel that my analysis of traditional housing architecture and urban form is not a nostalgic, regionalist and localist attachment to the past, nor a reflection of treating place as a closed system with fixed characteristics. I rather hold the notion of a dialectical process of creation and change that takes place over time in relation to historical and existing frames of reference. The lack of a dialectical, dynamic process of creation has resulted in conflict. As a result, the overall urban form in Iran has been confused and unclear. What seems to have been happening is that the traditional Iranian architecture and production of space diminished and a capitalist way of organising social space and lifestyles began. It does not take long for a person with a critical eye to notice chaotic and unthoughtful urban planning and housing projects in the city of Tehran. As Abu-Lughod argues:

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The reason we are interested in ‘traditional forms of buildings, dwellings and settlements is that we believe that such achievements meet human needs in a more sensitive way than contemporary and/or alien methods do. It is this belief that sends us back to the past, and that sends us to the local and the specific. Our respect for these undeniable achievements, and our dissatisfaction with our current mechanism for translating human needs into the built environment are the motivations behind our renewed interest in vernacular architecture and settlement plans.\textsuperscript{45}

A dialectical and evolutionary process can provide continuity in terms of cultural identity, memory and a sense of community. The adaptation of Western models of planning and housing architecture contradicts and diminishes customs and traditional concepts of planning. Moreover, the transition from traditional planning to the modern concept of planning requires sensitive and very detailed adjustment to make it compatible with the historical fabric of the city. Cities in Iran are caught in these contradictory spaces of globalisation versus localisation. The city of Tehran is also the victim of the incompatibility of different concepts of planning; it is a mega-city whose history has been influenced by the forces of modernity. The history of Tehran is largely intertwined with the forces of modernity and the impact of these forces on the urban fabric of the city.

It seems that there is an incompatibility between West/South Asian notions of planning and the Western model. As a result of this incompatibility, there has been an unsuccessful change in the physical fabric of cities. This incompatibility is what Stefano Bianca calls ‘structural conflict’. He suggests that:

\begin{quotation}
The method and standards of modern physical planning were established as corrective to the shortcomings of the new development concept and are an outcome of the administrative and institutional framework produced by secular industrial civilizations. It is therefore not surprising if they should fail when
\end{quotation}

transferred to the context of traditional societies which obey different prerogatives.46

It can be seen that, for Bianca, there are some structural conflicts between traditional Islamic concepts and modern Western planning methods. Some examples of the conflict are different concepts of community structure, planning and architectural forms. Today’s Iranian housing architecture and urban design mostly copy modern Western-style high-rises, tower blocks, fast food chains and shopping malls. Thousands of planned mini-cities in the outskirts of major cities are crammed with high-rise concrete apartments and exhibit the repetitive use of colours, with limited imagination or reference to the architecture of the past. This is based on my own observations and field research in different cities in Iran such as Tehran, Isfahan and Kashan. Iranian architect Hossein Amanat, in an interview with Aini Bahai TV, also noted that ‘Iranian architecture has been highly influenced by Western ideas of modern architecture without paying attention to the rich past history of traditional Iranian architecture’.47 Bahram Shirdel is another Iranian architect who, in an interview with Shargh Daily newspaper on 18 June 2016, stated, ‘Iranian architects and architecture are generally suffering from “westoxification” (gharbzadeh, and mostly are influenced by Western modernism and Western celebrity architects’.48

In the same interview, Amanat remarked that ‘copy and paste urban design and housing architecture not as a sign of progress but rather increasing our dependency on the West’49. For example, Isfahan used to be the capital of Iran during the Safavid dynasty under Shah Abbas (1050–1722). A city located in the middle of Iran, at the intersection of south and north, Isfahan is well known for its architecture, grand boulevards, bridges, tiled mosques and minarets. Although the city has retained some of the grand monuments of its past glory, contemporary housing architecture and city planning in Isfahan is influenced, as in other Iranian cities, by Western modernist concepts of design and


47 Aini Bahai TV, وﮕﺗﻔﮔ- نوﺣﯾﺳ ﮓﻧﺷوھ 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5o_pTc3SZD0> [accessed 27 January 2021].


49 Ibid.
architecture. The suburb of Sepahan City, located southwest of Isfahan and built on what used to be a military area, is another example of building tower blocks in the Western style.

This interest in modernist architecture, breaking with tradition and applying Western methods instead (such as by exploring concrete materials), can be seen in Iranian architects from the 1930s onwards. Promoting the modern architecture of Le Corbusier and the use of reinforced cement can be found in an early architectural magazines in 1946, *The Architect*. In the first issue of the magazine, Manouchehr Khorsandi, an architect and city planner, stated that ‘with the influence of Western culture in Iran and introducing Iranians to European modern life all aspects of our living have been revolutionised, and made people aware of defects in Iranian architecture’.50 Another Iranian architect who strongly believed that old traditional methods of housing construction and city planning should be replaced with new modern ideas was Vartan Hovanessian (1896–1982). In the same magazine issue, in an article entitled ‘Architectural Issues in Iran’, Hovanessian extensively discussed the necessity of abandoning ancient building materials such as mud, rubble, bricks, cut stone, gravel and wood, as well as changing methods and design. He dismissed the idea of continuity between past, present and future in architecture, and condemned the attempt that was made to combine the old Iranian architecture with new ideas.51

For architects such as Hovanessian, Khorsandi and their contemporaries, Iranian architecture, with its bold decoration and ornamentation, was a thing of the past. It had no place in modern life and architecture. This indicates that modern architecture, specifically the ideas of Le Corbusier and Adolf Loos, was influential on Iranian architects and city planners and also on Iranian city


design and housing in the years to come. My intention is not to view all of the architectural works of the people above figures as negative. In fact, there are individual modernist buildings built by these architects for which they deserve great credit. For instance, the Vartan House, designed by Hovanessian and located in district 6 in Tehran, is a magnificent three-floor villa full of stunning architectural details.\textsuperscript{52} Vartan House has been converted into a museum and art gallery, open to the public.

The modern concept of physical planning and architecture can be traced back to the early 1920s in the post-war era in Europe.\textsuperscript{53} The movement’s focus was on experimenting with materials such as reinforced concrete, glass and steel. It was associated mostly with the function of buildings, the rational use of materials and the elimination of ornamentation and decoration.\textsuperscript{54} One of the most famous phrases and main principles of modern architecture was ‘form follows function’, which means that the purpose of any building should be the main focus of its design rather than its aesthetic qualities.\textsuperscript{55} The impact of these modern ideas on Iran’s city planning and housing architecture from the 1940s onwards is the subject of analysis of this multi-sensory artistic research. The incorporation of modern movement ideas without investigating the possible consequences for future Iranian cities resulted in the creation of many concrete tower block monstrosities. After all, visual style is also an important dimension of a building; decoration, embellishment and modifications in shape can give a building significant visual quality. Housing planning should evolve while considering dwellers’ sensory experience and bodily engagement.

As L. Carl Brown explains, ‘There is, accordingly, a growing sentiment to regard cities from other parts of the world not as faraway places with strange-sounding names but as recognizable varieties of a familiar species- the modern urban

\textsuperscript{52} https://livingintehran.com/2018/04/25/urban-regeneration-vartan-house/

\textsuperscript{53} ‘1920s Modern Movement Architecture | RIBA’, RIBApix

\textsuperscript{54} ‘Modernist Architecture’ (https://www.designingbuildings.co.uk)
<https://www.designingbuildings.co.uk/wiki/Modernist_architecture> [accessed 15 January 2021].

\textsuperscript{55} ‘Form Follows Function’ (https://www.designingbuildings.co.uk)
<https://www.designingbuildings.co.uk/wiki/Form_follows_function> [accessed 16 January 2021].
agglomeration'. Technological and economic imperatives seem to conspire in ensuring that the world’s cities look increasingly similar: an economical use of limited space dictates high-rise buildings. Deyan Sudjic sees the emergence of similar high-rise buildings in every city all over the world as a sign of increasing American influence. According to Sudjic, 'Skyscrapers are as much an essential part of America’s identity as the coke bottle, baseball, and the Marlboro cowboy'. Transferring such features into other cultures threatens the distinctive aspects of other cultural systems and erases local differences in favour of global uniformity. Patterson defines global culture as ‘nothing more than American cultural imperialism’. This transformation of local to global has changed the experience of distinct places, although for Dovey and Giddens this transformation does not necessarily mean the loss of ‘place’; rather, it is a loss of self-identity. The construction of places in line with a global architecture style has a ‘collagist character’, creating tension and confusion rather than telling a historical narrative.

As Dovey observes:

An understanding of the nexus of place and power requires that we move beyond philosophical conceptions of place to an understanding of how such a place experience has been transformed under conditions of global capitalism. There is no scope here for a detailed account of globalization, which is generally understood as a cluster of interrelated conditions, two of which are particularly pertinent here: the collapse of lived distance

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56 Brown and Lapidus, p. 18.

57 Brown and Lapidus, p. 18.


60 Dovey, p. 53.
through accelerated global flows of capital, people and information
... and the production of global cultures.\textsuperscript{61}

All over the world, rapid urbanisation has washed away the distinctiveness of
different regions and countries. Places that have had their own way of building
their cities have lost a bit of their distinctiveness and authenticity. Although no
one can confuse the diversity of natural wonders and particular cultural
productions that each country has to offer, we cannot be so sure about the urban
scene, which reveals to us increasing similarities and uniformities. Anthony King
sees this uniformity as an 'invention and selective appropriation, worldwide, of
particular signs of modernity- especially, the high-rise tower- whether in the
urban context in the West or outside it'.\textsuperscript{62}

It is in this context that I intend to study the Iranian urban form and housing
architecture—the very materiality, as well as the spatial and symbolic elements
that buildings and architecture represent. This dissertation, through its artistic
research employing a multi-sensory methodology, will interpret and reflect on
the living environment described above.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{62} King, p. 3.
Literature Review

Although there have been many studies that deal with Iranian culture, history, politics and, particularly, Western influence, there have been insufficient multi-sensory artistic interventions focusing on the Western impact on Iranian cities, urban form and housing architecture. There is still a huge research gap in this area. Works such as *Isfahan and Its Palaces* (2008) by Susan Babaie, *Slaves of the Shah* (2004) by Kathryn Babayan and Sussan Babaie, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (1983) and *A History of Modern Iran* (2018) by Ervand Abrahamian, *State and Society in Iran* (2000) by Homa Katouzian and *The Persians* (2009) by Homa Katouzian described changes in Iranian society, cities’ histories, palaces and the lives of the founders, but without any critical discussion of urban forms, architecture and domestic practices.


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The questions that underpin this research are those that challenge urban development, the construction of new housing projects and urban design in Tehran. What follows in this multi-sensory research is a critical reflection on urban space and housing architecture, adopting an ideology that developed out of Marxism in the 1970s. This critical urban tradition was pioneered in the West by Henri Lefebvre\textsuperscript{64}, David Harvey\textsuperscript{65} Manuel Castells\textsuperscript{66} and later by the likes of Neil Smith\textsuperscript{67} and Andy Merrifield\textsuperscript{68}. The work of all these scholars has been influential and will be a reference point in this thesis.

The other tradition that plays a huge role throughout this research, and that I attempt to contribute towards, is that including Edward Said\textsuperscript{69}, Samir Amin\textsuperscript{70}, Janet Abu-Lughod\textsuperscript{71}, Ira M. Lapidus\textsuperscript{72} and Nezar AlSayyad\textsuperscript{73}. I believe that the former group of scholars lay the best theoretical foundation for critical urban studies. This tradition states that the city plays an important role in the capitalist mode of production, and that there is thus an intertwined relationship between the city and the maintenance of capitalism. Merrifield observes that ‘the city assumes a twin role: an engine for capital accumulation, on the one hand, and a site for social struggle/ class struggle, on the other’.\textsuperscript{74} The latter group have

\textsuperscript{64} Henri Lefebvre, Neil Smith and Robert Bononno, \textit{The Urban Revolution} (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

\textsuperscript{65} David Harvey, \textit{Social Justice and the City}, rev. edn (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), p. 16.


\textsuperscript{74} Merrifield, p. 1.
performed the best urban studies to reveal how capital accumulation and the Western concept of city planning have had a disturbing impact on cities and social life in the Global South. In my view, these two intellectual traditions inform each other and are in dialogue. Moreover, the first group of scholars exposed the production of space in cities under the forces of capitalism. Additionally, they also revealed capital expansion as a universal force. The second group of intellectuals exposed how this universal force and expansion has been endangering national and local values embedded in other cultures and cities. The work of all the above scholars has provided a dialectical framework for the case study of Tehran and *Pardis Phase 11* in this research.

Bringing these two traditions together has provided a context that allows one to see the bigger picture of the contemporary city. It seems essential to look at historical stages of the city’s transformation, offering an account of these transformations in Iranian society and its capital city. I set out to understand these changes in the context of urban socio-spatial change via a sensory investigation of the city, to determine how Tehran developed the particular urban form it has today. The case study of Tehran and *Pardis Phase 11* demonstrates the tensions and contradictions of modernity and global capitalism through sensory experience of the place. ‘Tehran’s modern history is full of debate about modernity, whether to accept it or reject it’.

For Madanipour, acceptance and rejection of modernity lies between the two revolutions that happened in the city. In his view, the first revolution of 1905–1911, which is known as the Constitutional Revolution, strongly promoted modernity. The second revolution during 1978–1979, known as the Islamic Republic Revolution, then cast doubts on many aspects of modernity. It is true that the historical roots of modernity can be found in the Constitutional Revolution with its intellectual background of implementing modern Western ideas in Iran. However, I am not convinced that the Islamic Republic Revolution

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76 Ibid.
stopped the process of modernisation altogether, although the traditional Ulama (clergy) were resistant to some aspects. They resisted it to the extent that it was threatening the middle class and its relationship to the traditional bazaar economy as well as the clergy with their ties to traditional Shi’a ideology and land ownership. The Ulama (clergy) played a crucial role in resisting the ideas of Western modernity. In the context of Islamic religion, the Ulama or علماء is the singular of علماء, which literally means those who know, or ‘the learned ones’. The Ulama are usually known as guardians of Islamic law and doctrine, and are interpreters of religious textbooks. Traditionally, the Ulama are educated in religious institutions known as Madrasa or مدرسة, although Madrasa can also refer to any type of educational institution.

Furthermore, Constitutionalists aimed to displace the old social order and promote ‘liberalism’, ‘secularism’, and ‘nationalism’. Revolutionaries sought to replace arbitrary power with law, representative government, and social justice and to resist the encroachment of imperial powers with conscious nationalism. The impact of these Western concepts can be traced back to the second half of the nineteenth century, as a result of Western penetration in Iran, and economic encounters in particular. On the other hand, cultural encounters also played an important role in developing ideas of modernity in Iran. A small group of young notables who had the means to travel and study in Europe then came back home and called themselves munavar al-fekr and roshanfekr (intellectuals or enlightened thinkers). The two most prominent nineteenth-century intellectuals were Sayyid Jamal al-Din or al-Afghani and Mirza Malkum Khan, who were considerably influenced by ideas from the European Enlightenment, especially the French Enlightenment. This encounter and influence brought new ideas into the intellectual Iranian scene, valuing human progress that was not only through religious revelation. Moreover, Western

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77 Ervand Abrahamian, Iran between Two Revolutions (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 50.


education convinced them that true knowledge derived from reason and modern science, not from revelation and religious teaching’. \(^{82}\) Additionally, other Western words and concepts entered into Iranian vocabulary in Farsi, such as despotism (despot), feudalism (feudal), parliament (parleman), democracy (demokrat), modernity (tajadod) and tradition (sonnat).

Many important works of literature were translated and circulated amongst the educated class. Most of these works came in the form of pamphlets, newspapers and books to influence public opinion. By the end of the nineteenth century, readers of such works were aware of ‘colonial imperial powers, constitutional crisis in France, the British parliamentary system, the course of German unification, presidential elections in the United States, and revolutionary currents and struggles for independence’\(^{83}\). Other works in the fields of geography, political philosophy and history were translated to give a bigger picture of Europe and its modern institutions. For example, a 1905 translation of *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith, *History of Ancient Near East* (translated from the French by Mohammad Ali Foroughi in 1900), *The History of Nadir Shah* by James Fraser (translated by Qaragozlu in 1903) and many other works were influential in shaping the consciousness of traditional and modern values in Iran.\(^{84}\)

To find out about the birth of modernity, one can dive into the 150–200-year history of the word ‘Modern’. Perhaps all the way back to the seventeenth century, when Descartes stated that ‘I think’ is the main point of departure. Or towards the end of the eighteenth century, when Immanuel Kant made subjective consciousness the ‘condition of possibility’ of objective knowledge. Perhaps the focus on subjectivity established by Kant is nothing other than the complex and contradictory changes produced by ‘modernity’: the speedy growth of industrial capitalism, the emergence of individual autonomy, the rising

\(^{82}\) Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 62.

\(^{83}\) Amanat, ‘Constitutional Revolution I. Intellectual’.

\(^{84}\) Amanat, ‘Constitutional Revolution I. Intellectual’. 
triumph of the scientific method in controlling nature for human ends and the deterioration of tradition. Or, as Habermas observes:

The term “modern” has a long history, one which has been investigated by Hans Robert Jauss. The word “modern” in its Latin form “modernus” was used for the first time in the late 5th century in order to distinguish the present, which had become officially Christian, from the Roman and pagan past. With varying content, the term “modern” again and again expresses the consciousness of an epoch that relates itself to the past antiquity, in order to view itself as the result of a transition from the old to the new.85

For Habermas, the term modern is related to having awareness of an era and its relation to the past. That is to say that people in different eras can consider themselves as modern through comparison with a previous social order. This new awareness of time and experience can also be seen in practices of everyday life in different eras. For instance, Lefebvre’s critique of ‘everyday life’ in the modern world refers to the dull, quotidian routine of zero-hours work contracts, paying the bills and paying back the bank creditors. As he says, ‘Everyday life is a crust of earth over the tunnels and caves of the unconscious and against a skyline of uncertainty and illusion that we call Modernity’.86 In the present context, we are referring to a common mode of experience of space and time. For Berman, ‘to be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction. It is to be overpowered by the immense bureaucratic organisations that have power to control and often to destroy all communities, values and lives’.87

Perhaps journeys and distresses should be explored to map the obscurities and contradictions of the human condition in even more depth. However, what has been observed so far makes it possible to interpret ‘modernity’, which this research is trying to make some sense of, as being the same as ‘planetary urbanisation’. If only with the help of Google Earth, one can travel the globe—from San Francisco to St Petersburg, from Shanghai to San Diego, from Tehran to Cape Town; from east to west and west to east as well as from the south to the north poles, from megacities in Europe to countries in the Global South—and


find strange similarities between most cities around the world. As Ricœur remarks:

> Everywhere throughout the world, one finds the same bad movie, the same slot machines, the same plastic or aluminum atrocities, the same twisting of languages by propaganda, etc. It seems as if mankind, by approaching en masse a basic consumer culture, were also stopped en masse at a subcultural level. Thus we come to the crucial problem confronting nations just rising from underdevelopment. In order to get on to the road toward modernization.\(^{88}\)

These similarities can be seen as a global urban expansion strategy: mega-construction projects increasingly use land for building huge shopping malls, high-rise residential areas, suburban housing offices and so on.

This concern with urbanism is an ideological issue, as these market-driven ideas have broadened into an interrogation of spatial ideologies. Therefore, urban practice, urban design and housing planning all become subcategories of spatial practice. One might realise here that there is a clear path from political to commercial to industrial urbanisation. The focus on the city is to explicitly target political organisation and the spatial ideologies behind everyday life. What this might mean is that spatial urban practices are the products of particular interests and policies.

As mentioned above, there is continuity between the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation. Therefore, the study of urbanisation should be in relation to social and economical processes that are operating in society as a whole. This will be an investigation into the concept of urban design and built form that ‘fades into a concern with all facets of man, society, nature, thought, ideology, production and so on, built around the concept of a relationally defined urbanism’.\(^{89}\)

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\(^{89}\) Harvey, p. 16.
For Lefebvre (2003), the problem of industrialisation, which has dominated capitalist societies for more than two centuries, is increasingly superseded by the urban: urban issues have become dominant. As Neil Smith describes, for Lefebvre the crisis of urban society was more profound than crises of capitalist industrialism.90

For David Harvey (1973), however, despite the broad commonality with Lefebvre (2003), the contradictions between urbanism and capitalism cannot be resolved in favour of the urban. According to Neil Smith:

Harvey was certainly sympathetic to Lefebvre’s effort, but for Harvey industrial capitalism continues to create the conditions for urbanisation, rather than the other way around, and the surplus value produced by capital accumulation, and especially its mode of circulation, is the raw material out of which urban change crystallizes. Urbanisation here is the excrescence of the circulation of capital. The global spread of urbanism, he concedes, is real, but the circuit of industrial capitalism still predominates over that of property capital devoted to urbanisation.91

At the present time, with our experience and understanding of twenty-first-century global capitalism, the validity of Harvey’s critique can be felt. With the spread of global urbanism and rapid growth of cities, a trend of universalisation of style and consumer culture has become dominant. As Ricœur notes:

The phenomena of universalization, while being an advancement of mankind, at the same time constitutes a sort of subtle destruction, not only of traditional cultures, which might not be an irreplaceable wrong, but also of what I shall call for the time being the creative nucleus of great cultures, that nucleus on the basis of which we interpret life, what I shall call in advance the ethical and mythical nucleus of mankind.92

Ricœur is implying here that this process of universalisation has a tendency to undermine the valuable aspects of traditional ways of life. As a result of this destructive characteristic of modernisation, he further observes, ‘there is the

90 Lefebvre, Smith and Bononno.
91 Ibid, p. xvii.
92 Ricœur.
paradox: how to become modern and return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization’. This shows how, on the one hand, it is necessary to understand the profound values of the past, and be open to adopting modern ways of living in a dialectical relationship on the other hand. I believe that, through continuity and productive dialogue between representatives of each side of this dichotomy, a new and sustainable way of life can flourish. However, it is this oscillation between Western rational instrumentalisation and traditionalism that has preoccupied the past 150 years of Iranian housing architecture and urban planning.

The theories and philosophies informing this research are located within different fields and disciplines, although they are linked together and intertwined in their totality. This chapter provides a critical review of the literature relevant to the questions that underpin this artistic research. My questions are located in the introduction of the thesis and are a search for understanding and reconciliation between tradition and modernity, locality and globalisation, and the physical and social aspects of built form.

In this research, I will look at architecture and urbanism as a context for the sensory experience of everyday life of home and the city. Within these lines of inquiry, I will be referring to Henri Lefebvre’s 1974 Production of Space, which was translated into English in 1991, and his Critique of Everyday Life, first published in 1947, for discussing notions such as ‘everyday life’, ‘modernity’ and ‘the social production of space’. Lefebvre presents a critique of domestic and everyday life by paying acute attention to urban environments under the conditions of modernity. His theory and philosophy of space also give attention to its production processes. Lefebvre contends that three aspects of space should be under investigation to arrive at a unitary urbanisation theory. Firstly, physical space (nature); this concept will be discussed extensively in the chapter on nature. Secondly, mental space (logical); and thirdly, social space, of which a detailed overview will also be presented in the chapter on space.

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93 Ibid, pp. 271–72.
Like Lefebvre, I believe that various social practices are involved in producing space, built environment and cities. It could be said that space as such can be considered a social product. To view space as a social product implies that attention should be paid to the processes and practices under the influence of certain ideologies producing a particular form of space. Furthermore, by the production of space as such, society itself is being reproduced. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that there is a reciprocal link between how space is viewed and how society is organised. This reciprocal link might also suggest the possibility of having criteria to realise a connection between ideology and practices that creates space. In *Production of Space*, Lefebvre looks at different historical epochs to distinguish how each society should produce its own particular space according to its historical, cultural and economic values and modes of production.

For example, Lefebvre examines socialism and revolution in the Soviet Union between 1920 and 1930. He questions state socialism in the context of its production of space. He believes that a ‘social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effect on daily life’. What I think Lefebvre is suggesting is that creative ability should be able to produce new emancipatory forms of life and social relationships. This might indicate that new social relationships and forms of life require new space, and vice versa. This proposition implies that social relationships and behaviour will change when producing a particular and living environment. In this research, I am interested in analysing post-revolutionary Iranian urban planning and architecture and its particular space production within this context.

Additionally, Lefebvre’s interdisciplinary and dialectical approach to analysing space, the city and everyday life informs my research. In particular, I have employed his regression–progression method to lay an interlocking foundation for my multisensory research. Regression–progression (Lefebvre, 1991) represents the interplay between theory and practice, abstract and concrete, which consists of three steps, described as follows:

1. Description – observation informed by experience and general theory.

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94 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 54.
2. *Analytico* (regressive) – analysis of reality as described, with an effort made to compare and not fall into vague statements.

3. *Historico* (genetic) – the study of modifications of the above structures through their evolution and subordination to more general structures. Classification of formation and structure in relation to general processes and attempt through explanation and elucidation to return to the present.\(^9\)

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Diagram No. 1, designed by Ali Mousavi.

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Concerning the three steps above, my research’s artistic component plays the role of description and analytico (regressive). It is based on my own observations, informed by sensory experience of a place and describing such experience within a sensory theoretical framework. This component consists of different sensory elements, which result from my observation and experience of the place under investigation: the suburban housing construction *Pardis Phase 11*. It also represents and analyses the reality of everyday life under particular methods of housing planning and architecture. Methodologically, the thesis, as a whole, sits between *analytico* (regressive) and *historico* (genetic). This last step deals with society’s abstract material and social processes: histories, the birth of ideas and concepts, and their associations and effects. In the thesis, I look at how some external methods and concepts can damage a society’s material and social development. I explore how modern rational Western urban planning was applied to Tehran’s traditional urban fabric during the modernisation process after the establishment of Pahlavi’s dynasty. Moreover, my interest in utilising the regressive–progressive method lies in its capacity to return to the past’s values and meaning to understand and evaluate the present and progress towards future possibilities.

Furthermore, as will be shown in the thesis, the imposition of external methods and concepts on a different society’s internal logic will lead to conflict. The relationship between internal and external ideas and practices can also be seen as the tension between tradition and modernity, between locality and forces of globalism. In the context of Islamic production of space and place-making, the tension has been based on stereotypical assumptions made by Western orientalist scholars reflecting on non-Western Islamic cities. They assumed that these traditional methods are lacking in rationale and harmony. It appears that this stereotype was also promulgated by Muslim and Eastern scholars mainly educated in Europe.

In conjunction with these issues, I consulted Nezar AlSayyad’s book *Cities and Caliphs* (1991). AlSayyad believes that the understanding of urban form in Muslim cities has been based on the institutionalisation of inaccurate knowledge. According to AlSayyad, analysis of Muslim cities has mainly been via stereotypes and in juxtaposition with European-style cities, rather than a critical examination in their own terms and cultural context.

My interest in AlSayyad’s work lies in his classification of urban form and space. He believes that there should be an analytical examination of the physical and built form of a city. AlSayyad’s combination of general theories such as figure-
ground theory and place theory helped me structure my approach. In the former, the focus is on the relationships between built form and open space, which he calls the analysis between solids and voids. In the latter, ‘social and cultural values, historical significance and visual perceptions of users are the main aspects’. Using this model, I will be analysing the city of Tehran, in particular my case study of Pardis Phase 11.

Furthermore, I primarily build on the tension between traditional Muslim production of space and the modern Western system of concepts and methods of place-making. I realise that there are different regions/countries with Muslim populations, cultural variations and traditional pasts. This tension can be seen as the oscillation between two social forms, i.e., Modernity and Tradition. Rejection of the former and acceptance of the latter or vice versa has typified the arguments over urban space in Iran in the last 150 years. My intellectual aim here is not to condemn concepts of progress and modernity; rather, I seek a reconciliation of the tension created by these social forms. According to Shirazi, ‘Standing or moving between two affirmative and negative modes towards Modernity and Tradition has registered itself as a critical urban condition’.96 This urban condition represents contradictory production of space, leading to extreme tension and uncertainty, which can be damaging to different realms of society. What is needed in such contradictory conditions is thoughtful movement towards reconciliation between external and internal methods and concepts—in other words, finding solutions and alternatives through the dialectical relationship between traditional and modern ideas.

As Shirazi also observes:

> It is neither possible to reject modernization nor to completely approve it; hence the fallacious dichotomy of Tradition–Modernity and selecting between two polar opposites must be replaced by another discourse. In this regard, a ‘dialogical exchange’ should be established, a ‘cross-cultural, exotopic dialogue’ in which ‘Modernity is no more reduced to the status of a simple

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96 Shirazi.
instrumental object or rejected as a dangerous enemy of the Iranian identity.\textsuperscript{97}

The main focus of my thesis is this tension in the context of architectural and urban transformation in the city of Tehran. In order to explore this tension and how it has been reflected in urban projects, I present an overview of the history of urban transformation and the impact of the Western model of planning and design on one contemporary housing development in Tehran in particular, Pardis Phase 11.

To explain this tension, I use Paul Ricœur’s classic essay ‘Universal Civilisation and National Culture’ from his invaluable book \textit{History and Truth} (1965). The text begins by presenting a twofold problem: the whole world is on the brink of becoming a singular universalised entity by adopting the technical, scientific and cultural rationality of the Western concept of progress. This poses the overwhelming challenge of adapting while also safeguarding cultural heritage and rootedness in the past. In other words, the problem presented here is the challenge of how a country can be on the path of progress and becoming modern and yet return to its rich history in order to revive valuable aspects of the culture.\textsuperscript{98} Ricœur argues that, although development and progress are necessary and advances human life, they can at the same time have a contradictory and destructive character.\textsuperscript{99}

Due to these characteristics, the process of universalisation of all cultures into a singular world comes at the risk of the destruction of the traditional and cultural resources of our ancestors.\textsuperscript{100} Consequently, as Ricœur concedes, ‘Everywhere throughout the world, one finds the same bad movie, the same slot machine, the same plastic or aluminium atrocities, the same twisting of language by propaganda, \textit{same entertainment TV programs, everywhere the same architectural style and same urban arrangements} [italics mine].\textsuperscript{101} This

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{98} Ricœur.

\textsuperscript{99} Ricœur, p. 276.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
worldwide movement towards universalisation involves all aspects of life; it progresses rapidly, like a virus, to the extent that one can see a global style of living and a worldwide culture of consumption.

However, this could be viewed as just one aspect of reality. Contrasting universal civilisation and national culture, Ricœur recognises the existence of a variety of cultures and their differences, instead of a singular cultural system. In the context of countries that are on the road of progress and modernisation, the multiplicity of cultures becomes of vital importance.

As Ricœur explains:

> In order to take part in modern civilisation, it is necessary at the same time to take part in scientific, technical, and political rationality, something which very often requires the pure and simple abandon of a whole cultural past. It is a fact: every culture can not sustain and absorb the shock of modern civilisation.\(^{102}\)

What Ricœur is implying is that there is a twofold dilemma: on the one hand, it is crucial to bring to light and learn about a country’s profound historical background, nurturing a national spirit and rooting in the soil of its past. But on the other hand, it is necessary to take part in the rationalising process in the realms of science, technology and culture, which may entail abandoning the whole cultural past. Ricœur continues, “There is the paradox: how to become modern and to return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilisation and take part in universal civilisation”.\(^{103}\) In making this comment, Ricœur urges us to consider the consequences of the encounter between cultures, the difficult task of remaining oneself and at the same time being open to adapting to the new possibilities offered by other civilisations. Additionally, it has to be noted that not all traditional cultures can survive and preserve their own particularity and character; not every culture has the capacity to find compatibility between

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\(^{102}\) Ricœur, p. 277.

\(^{103}\) Ibid.
internal and external forces of logic.\textsuperscript{104} Certain conditions are required and it is necessary for a culture to be ‘capable of assimilating scientific rationality’ and not only interested in internal and traditional logic in order to produce ‘simple folkloric ornamentation’, but rather to be interested in tradition solely ‘in order to ceaselessly invent’.\textsuperscript{105}

Moreover, it is in understanding one’s own national history, cultural resources, traditional values and spiritual belief system that the capacity for re-inventing and the projection into different perspectives become possible. As Ricœur concludes, ‘only a living culture, at once faithful to its origins and ready for creativity on the levels of art, literature, philosophy and spirituality, is capable of sustaining the encounter of other cultures- not merely capable of sustaining but also of giving meaning to that encounter’.\textsuperscript{106} To arrive at a dialectical relationship and reconciliation between the two sides of the paradox mentioned above, there must be a mediatary approach and productive engagement.

The challenge of reconciliation between Modernism and traditionalism, globalisation and localisation—or, in Ricœur’s words, the paradox of being modern and returning to sources—is poignant in the context of Iran. The last 150 years in Iran have been seen in the light of the confrontation between Modernisation (\textit{Tajadod}), Universalisation and Globalisation on the one hand and Traditionalism (\textit{Sonnat}), National culture and localisation on the other.\textsuperscript{107} 108 109 110 This tension has been firstly seen in the domain of religion in Iranian society, and over time found its way into other reformist movements that were demanding a constitutional government.\textsuperscript{111} However, this confrontation was by

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{104}] Ricœur, p. 281.
\item[\textsuperscript{105}] Ricœur, p. 282.
\item[\textsuperscript{106}] Ricœur, p. 283.
\item[\textsuperscript{108}] Shirazi, p. 3.
\item[\textsuperscript{109}] Abrahamian, \textit{Iran between Two Revolutions}.
\item[\textsuperscript{110}] Ramin Jahanbegloo, ed., \textit{Iran between Tradition and Modernity} (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).
\end{itemize}
no means stationary, but moved beyond intellectual discussions and theoretical realms. Jamshid Behnam, in his essay ‘Iranian Society, Modernity, and Globalization’, observes that ‘The political component of this latter movement aimed at autocratic or despotic rulers, and the social cultural component aimed at social engineering and bringing about new ways of thinking and living’.\footnote{112}

The tension between globalisation and localisation has had impacts on Iranian cities and architecture, which were traditionally shaped according to local environmental concerns and cultural values. The case study of Tehran presented in this research shows this tension. The source of this paradox can be found early on in Iran. For instance, The Architect, an early Iranian architect’s magazine published in 1946 in Tehran, promoted Le Corbusier’s modern architecture and praised the use of reinforced concrete. Manouchehr Khorsandi, an architect and city planner, remarks that ‘with the influence of Western culture in Iran and introducing Iranians to European modern life all aspects of our living have been revolutionised, and made people aware of defects in Iranian architecture’ in the first issue of the magazine.\footnote{113}

Vartan Hovanessian (1896–1982), a graduate of Paris’s École Spéciale d’Architecture in 1922, was another Iranian architect who strongly believed that traditional methods of housing construction and city planning should be replaced with modern Western ideas. The Modern architecture movement, particularly the Austrian architect Adolf Loos, was a major influence on Hovanessian.

Hovanessian extensively discusses the need to abandon traditional building materials, methods, and design in the same magazine, in a 1946 article titled ‘Architectural Issues in Iran’. Hovanessian dismissed the search for continuity between past, present and future in architecture and harshly condemned the attempt to combine old Iranian architecture with new ideas.\footnote{114} Modernism in

\footnote{112} Ibid, p. 4.\\

\footnote{113} Khorsandi.\\

\footnote{114} Hovanessian.
Iranian architecture was advocated for and pioneered by Hovanessian and other Iranian young architects who studied architecture at European universities. Two more important figures were Iranian-Armenian Gabriel Guevrekian (1900–1970), who graduated in 1921 from the Hochschule für angewandte Kunst in Vienna; and Keyghobad Zafar (born in 1910), who graduated from the Royal College of Art and the Architectural Association in London. For them, traditional Iranian architectural elements such as bold decoration and ornamentation were a thing of the past and had no place in modern life or architecture. The interest in modernist architecture ‘introduced into Iran a new language that broke all links and continuity with the past’.

It should be noted that this tendency toward modernist architecture and urban planning was a manifestation of the rapid pace of modernisation during Reza Shah’s first reign as Pahlavi ruler (1921–1941). As a result, the government launched a major modernisation project in Tehran. Many old buildings, as well as twelve historical city gates, were demolished in 1930 to allow for the modernisation process, with the goal of transforming Tehran into a modern capital. The Shah’s plan, known as Naghshe-ye Khiaban-ye Jadid, or ‘Plan of the New Avenues’, and launched in 1937, provided a justification for the destruction of the old city. This plan called for the construction of a new transportation system and new wide boulevards that cut through the city’s old fabric. As Shirazi points out, ‘the dominant presupposition was that the traditional urban morphology had no logic but was rather a situation of chaos requiring rapid organisation’.

In order to illustrate how Tehran has oscillated between universal civilisation (modernity) and national culture (tradition), a historical overview of the process of modern urban transformation of the traditional fabric in the city is presented in the thesis. Furthermore, I suggest that, in order for reconciliation and to arrive at a dialectical dialogue between the two extreme poles, there must be a mediatory approach and productive engagement. My study of Kenneth Frampton’s Critical Regionalism approach to architecture makes me confident


116 Shirazi, pp. 10–11.

117 Shirazi, pp. 11–12.

that this concept provides a necessary foundation to offer an alternative and
dialectical language between localisation and globalisation, and between
Westernisation and modernisation on the one hand and traditional values on
the other.
Critical Regionalism: Towards an Alternative Solution

Regionalism suggests a cure for many current ills. Focused in the region, sharpened for the more definite enhancement of life, every activity, cultural or practical, menial or liberal, becomes necessary and significant; divorced from this context, and dedicated to archaic or abstract scheme of salvation and happiness, even the finest activities seem futile and meaningless; they are lost and swallowed in a vast indefiniteness.\(^{119}\)

My aim here is to offer a thematic overview of the theory of Critical Regionalism, and to suggest the theory as an alternative to the threat of universalisation of urban landscape and housing. I explain how the concept of Critical Regionalism presents itself as a reconciliation between universalisation and national culture. Critical Regionalism thus establishes a constructive dialogue between modernity and tradition, and so is a significant consideration for this thesis. For the purpose of my research, the tension between modernity and tradition is highlighted in the field of urban planning and design in Tehran. Thus, this chapter discusses how that tension ought to be approached.

The term Critical Regionalism is associated with architect and historian Kenneth Frampton. The theory of Critical Regionalism developed during the late 1970s as an alternative approach to the globalised style of architecture and design. The term was coined by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, then developed further by Frampton. An important and crucial aspect of Critical Regionalism, according to Frampton, is a ‘commitment to place rather than space’.\(^{120}\)


Ricœur’s essay ‘Universal Civilisation and National Culture’, which I discussed earlier.

What I found interesting about Frampton’s selection from Ricœur’s book is that it, too, shows Frampton’s interest in reconciliation between the local and the universal. Like Frampton, I think it is within a localised context that an alternative set of ideas can develop and be actualised. Frampton’s approach to architecture is very much influenced by his interest in the two philosophical discourses of phenomenology and existentialism. As he remarks,

Anyone who is familiar with my writing will at once detect the influence of two different lines of critical thought which in the main are German in origin—lines stemming from Hegel and Marx and culminating in Gramsci and the Frankfurt School; and another line, stemming from Nietzsche and Husserl, the school which encompasses in its range both phenomenology and existentialism and stretches to the writings of Heidegger and Hannah Arendt.\(^{121}\)

Nonetheless, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and Hannah Arendt are the two major sources of inspiration for his work. For instance, in Modern Architecture: A Critical History (1992), Frampton states that he, amongst many other scholars of his generation, was influenced by ‘a Marxist interpretation of history’; in the same book, he also mentions that his affinity for the critical theory of the Frankfurt School helped him to develop his thought and made him ‘aware of the dark side of the Enlightenment which, in the name of unreasonable reason, has brought man to a situation where he begins to be as alienated from his own production as from the natural world’.\(^{122}\) Furthermore, Frampton views


the Frankfurt School as ‘the only valid basis upon which to develop a form of (post) modern critical culture’. Frampton praised Hannah Arendt’s ideas and noted that her 1958 book *The Human Condition* ‘was and still is an important reference for my work. It is not a Marxist thesis, but certainly a political one’. These influences shaped Frampton’s critical architectural thinking and put him in a mediatory position. As Reza Shirazi notes in *Contemporary Architecture and Urbanism in Iran* (2018), Frampton’s work

On the one hand ... advocate a critical approach to the overwhelming tendencies and patterns of thought supported by the master narrative of techno-science. On the other hand, he carves out the superficial and catches the essence and origin of things and sheds light on the phenomenological aspects of the environment. Ultimately, this twofold departure point culminates in a mediatory position which benefits from the advantages of both traditions but stands somewhere in-between: a space of dialogue and confrontation.

It is this space of in-between, standing between two poles, that Frampton occupies in his work. It is a position that does not reject the whole of one and accept the other; instead, it is an attempt to find a solution by rediscovering the past and reflecting on the present. Therefore, it becomes a dialectical expression of the tensions and paradoxes of becoming modern but at the same time returning to one’s own roots and culture. Inheriting an old, dormant civilisation but taking part in universal civilisation, as expressed by Ricœur and highlighted earlier in this chapter, became a crucial theme in Frampton’s concept of Critical Regionalism. In this sense, Critical Regionalism can be seen as a theory that seeks to create a dialogue between national culture and universal civilisation, modernity and tradition, global capitalism and local identity. ‘The case can be made that Critical Regionalism as a cultural strategy is as much a bearer of *world culture* as it is a vehicle of *universal civilization*’. In this regard, the practice of Critical Regionalism plays a double role: it looks back at the

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125 Shirazi, p. 28.

traditions of a particular region, without falling into the trap of romanticism or nostalgia; and it aims to critique and resist the homogenisation and standardisation of physical and social aspects of all cultures. It has to deconstruct the overall spectrum of world culture and it has to achieve, through synthetic contradiction, a manifest critique of universal civilization.\textsuperscript{127} This might mean being rooted in one’s own culture and being local, and at the same time participating in a global culture. As Frampton observes:

Local in the sense that there is a modern necessity to reinterpret native tradition without degenerating into kitsch historicism; universal in the sense that the cultural ‘void’ (aporia) of the developed or developing countries arises out of the fact that the innocence implied by the continuum of the vernacular in any profound sense is irrevocably lost.\textsuperscript{128}

In my view, what the quote above is suggesting is that it is crucial to maintain a high degree of self-reflection and understand the necessity of looking back at the values of one’s own tradition. One must also realise the impact that universalisation can have on the character of a particular place. Here, I introduce a set of principles that can be considered fundamental to Critical Regionalism.

The tension between national culture and universalisation, modernity and tradition, and the production of a global style that was discussed earlier can be found in so-called developing countries, in places with a variety of traditional costumes and identity. These are places that are ‘on the fringes which have not been conquered by consumer society’.\textsuperscript{129} There is something special about such societies, a particular locality or perhaps an opportunity to learn about and explore other possibilities. Or, to use Frampton’s interpretation, ‘these peripheral

\textsuperscript{127} Frampton, ‘Towards a Critical Regionalism’.


nodes were able to sustain a more multi-layered complexity of architectural culture'. I think, with this explanation, Frampton points to regional practices, which, to some extent, aim to resist cultural homogenisation. They are representative of places with ‘an anti-centrist sentiment—a discernible aspiration for some kind of cultural, economic and potential independence’.

Additionally, this could be on the level of national and collective endeavour or could be seen in individual projects with a strong sense of local identity and culture. Perhaps these manifestations support resistance of various forms of cultural homogenisation and standardisation of structures that would diminish local differentiation. Moreover, homogenisation has reduced the modern city to a placeless environment. Frampton believes that the ‘universal Megalopolis is patently antipathetic to a dense differentiation of culture’ and has reduced the ‘environment to nothing but commodity’. In other words, Critical Regionalism produces some kind of architecture of resistance. For Frampton, the sustainability of such architecture is to take the position of an *arrière-garde*, which stands far ‘from the Enlightenment myth of progress and from a reactionary, unrealistic impulse to return to the archetonic forms of the past’.

An *arrière garde* position allows for resistance towards the creation of placelessness through megacity development, and at the same time has the capacity to support and celebrate cultural differences and local identity. As Frampton observes, this position ‘should be seen not so much as categorical opposites between which we must choose, but rather as the points of dialectic interaction’. In this regard, the role of Critical Regionalism is not only reactionary or criticising, but rather to bring both sides of the debate into a constructive dialogue. There now follows a discussion of place and space from Frampton’s point of view in the context of his Critical Regionalism. As mentioned above, what concerns Frampton is that practices involved in urban design and architecture have reduced the environment into a mere commodity and this commodification of the built environment ‘negates local identity and...”

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130 Frampton, ‘Place-Form and Cultural Identity’.


expression’. Consequently, this negation creates a placeless living environment for its inhabitants, which has no cultural and historical meaning. I argue in this research that my case study Pardis Phase 11 is an example of this commodification and an urban design with no concern for local typology or climate and devoid of cultural and historical meaning. These aspects are the concerns that Critical Regionalism hopes to address for achieving authentic architecture and urban design. According to Frampton, ‘if any central principle of critical regionalism can be isolated, then it is surely a commitment to place rather than space’. Additionally, it is this commitment to place over space that makes an authentic local identity and is prioritised in Critical Regionalism. However, the focus on place does not necessarily mean diminishing and ignoring the concept of space.

As noted above, for Frampton the living environment has been reduced to a mere commodity; this might also mean the creation of a ‘non-place urban realm’, which leads to a ‘rush city’, ‘mass culture’ and extensive technological rationalisation of space. Additionally, this might indicate that the concept of space has been viewed in abstract, geometrical and mathematical terms, which can result in the loss of place, local identity and social aspects of space. Moreover, the ideas of regionalism, local identity, tradition and community are tied to the idea of place making and the social aspect of space. Frampton writes that ‘the receptivity and sensitive resonance of a place—to wit its sensate validity qua place—depends on its stability in the everyday sense and second, on the appropriateness and richness of the socio-cultural experience it offers’. Based on this, perhaps it can be concluded that Critical Regionalism gives high importance to place-form making and the social aspects of space. The importance of social space has been discussed in depth in the chapter on urban space and design.

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136 Nesbitt, p. 481.

As discussed earlier, as a result of reducing the environment to a commodity and having a universal approach to site and urban design, there is a condition of placelessness. Thus, the living environment and built form has turned into a commodity free from any relation to cultural identity and topography. As shown in the case study of Pardis Phase 11, there is a tendency in the universal approach to construct a totally flat foundation through enormous earthworks. This is achieved by using heavy machinery and bulldozing the entire topography of a natural landscape. It has resulted in hundreds of free-standing tower blocks without any dialectical relation to the topography of the site. In this regard, Critical Regionalism offers a more direct dialectical relation with the environment and the topographical conditions. In addition, Frampton argues that the

Specific culture of the region—that is to say, its history in both a geological and agricultural sense—becomes inscribed into the form and realization of the work. This inscription, which arises out of “in-laying” the building into the site, has many levels of significance, for it has the capacity to embody, in built form, the prehistory of the place, its archaeological past and its subsequent cultivation and transformation across time.138

From my understanding, what the passage above demonstrates is Critical Regionalism’s approach to built form. The attention paid to the ‘prehistory of the place’, ‘archaeological past’ and ‘cultivation and transformation’ is embodied in the physical construction as well as the culture of a region. In other words, the construction of the site becomes about rereading and reinterpreting its history devoid of nostalgia and sentimentality. I believe that, in the context of the case study of Pardis Phase 11, all of these elements of Critical Regionalism could be applied. As will be shown in this research, the project of Pardis Phase 11 housing area was built on barren land. This could have been seen as a huge and rare opportunity to build infrastructure with attention paid to the history of the city of Tehran, cultural values, topographical conditions, and climate. An example of such an approach is the architectural and design projects of Alvar Aalto, the Finnish architect and designer whose work is discussed elsewhere in this research.

It is equally important in the case of topography to discuss the climate and local qualities of lighting. From Frampton’s point of view, ‘the sensitive modulation and incorporation of such factors must almost by definition be fundamentally opposed to the optimum use of universal technique’.139 For instance, a universal


approach towards light has favoured extensive use of artificial lighting, and ignored existing natural local light. As Frampton observes:

Until recently, the received precepts of modern curatorial practice favored the exclusive use of artificial light in all art galleries. It has perhaps been insufficiently recognized how this encapsulation tends to reduce the artwork to a commodity, since such an environment must conspire to render the work placeless. This is because the local light spectrum is never permitted to play across its surface.\footnote{Frampton, ‘Towards a Critical Regionalism’, p. 29.}

What Frampton might be suggesting here is that universal planning and methods of construction, the use of the same industrial materials and the application of modern technology have contributed to the loss of the aura each region has to offer. Additionally, ‘Modern urban development has favoured the proliferation of a universal, privatised, placeless domain’.\footnote{Kenneth Frampton, ‘Ten Points on an Architecture of Regionalism: A Provisional Polemic’, in \textit{Architectural Regionalism, Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity, and Tradition}, ed. by Vincent B. Canizaro (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007).} To reverse this placelessness, Critical Regionalism highlights the ‘natural characteristics of the site and avoids the imposition of artificial features at the expense of the existing forces of the environment’.\footnote{Shirazi.} Despite the importance of the various aspects of Critical Regionalism discussed so far, it should be mentioned that tactility is another critical aspect in perceiving the environment. ‘The tactile resilience of the place-form and the capacity of the body to read the environment in terms other than those of sight alone suggest a potential strategy for resisting the domination of universal technology’.\footnote{Frampton, ‘Towards a Critical Regionalism’.} The attitude towards perceiving the environment in the Western context, Frampton argues, has given priority to sight and vision. Additionally, under most circumstances, the stress has been ‘placed upon

\begin{footnotes}
\item Frampton, ‘Towards a Critical Regionalism’, p. 29.
\item Shirazi.
\item Frampton, ‘Towards a Critical Regionalism’.
\end{footnotes}
rationalized sight in the evolution of Renaissance architecture, i.e., perspective.\textsuperscript{144} This supremacy of vision has resulted in neglecting the contribution of other senses such as hearing, taste, smell and touch. Frampton contends that we have to remind ourselves that built form should be ‘experienced by the entire sensorium; that is to say, senses other than optic nerve are involved’.\textsuperscript{145}

As mentioned above, vision’s domination over the other senses has a long history in Western thought and philosophy. For instance, ‘In classical Greek thought, certainty was based on vision and visibility’.\textsuperscript{146} ‘Plato regarded vision as humanity’s greatest gift, Aristotle, likewise, considered sight as the most noble of the senses, similarly, Heraclitus wrote the eyes are more exact witnesses than ears’.\textsuperscript{147} This ocular-centric tradition can even be seen in early modernist theory, with prominent modern architects such as Le Corbusier making statements along the lines of ‘I exist in life only if I can see, I am and I remain an impenitent visual-everything is in the visual or one needs to see clearly in order to understand’.\textsuperscript{148}

To overcome this ‘vision-generated’ and ‘vision-centred’ paradigm, Critical Regionalism highlights tactility and employs multi-sensory perception. As Frampton observes:

\begin{quote}
In attempting to counter this loss, the tactile opposes itself to the scenographic and drawing of veils over the surface of reality. Its capacity to arouse the impulse to touch returns the architect to the poetics of construction and to the creation of works in which the tectonic value of each component depends upon the density of its objecthood. The tactile and the tectonic jointly have the capacity to transcend the mere appearance of technical in much the same way as the place-form has the potential to withstand the relentless onslaught of global modernization.\textsuperscript{149}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{144} Frampton, ‘Ten Points on an Architecture’.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} Frampton, ‘Towards a Critical Regionalism’, pp. 32–33.
\end{flushleft}
Alvar Aalto created a number of architectural projects that can be appreciated in a tactile manner. An example is *Baker House* in Boston, USA, which will be discussed in detail later. The use of red brickwork as well as deformed bricks to create texture; the shape of the building in the form of waves, which can be viewed in harmony with the Charles River’s movement; the use of different materials; and other factors all contribute to a multi-sensory experience. Thus, it can be concluded that the Critical Regionalism approach resists a global style of urban planning and architecture. Although it is critical of modern urban planning, it ‘never abandons the progressive aspects of the modern architecture legacy’.150

As discussed earlier, Critical Regionalism’s ‘salient cultural precept is place creation’ and it is against ‘ceaseless inundation of a place-less, alienating consumerism’.151 Moreover, site-specific and local conditions such as topography, climate and natural forces like ‘air movement’, ‘smell’, ‘acoustics’, and ‘ambient temperature’ are of great importance for tectonics, which can be linked to the creation of a place. For Critical Regionalism, there is no hierarchy of the senses; touch is just as important as sight. In other words, Critical Regionalism invites the entire body into a multi-sensory experience of the living environment. And finally, Critical Regionalism archives these not through a nostalgic and sentimental approach to the past and local identity, but by a reinvention and re-interpretation of tradition and everything that is rooted in the culture. Additionally, it is open to encounter and to receiving influence from other cultures and local elements. ‘Critical Regionalism is a dialectical expression, it self-consciously seeks to deconstruct universal modernism in terms of values and images that are locally cultivated’.152

There are a few factors that make Critical Regionalism a significant departure for this research: On the one hand, Critical Regionalism situates itself between the


151 Ibid.

152 Ibid.
two poles of modernity and tradition. It neither rejects nor accepts either of these forces totally; it focusses on where and how these two forces could interact. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Critical Regionalism’s focus is on reconciliation and creating a dialogue. It is this mediatory position that makes it applicable to the context of Tehran and the case study of Pardis Phase 11. As shown in this research, the history of Tehran is that of confrontation between the old and the new, tradition (Sonat) and modernity (Tajadod). The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran has been viewed as a result of a collision between these two forces, prompted by an anti-modern, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist drive.

On the other hand, Critical Regionalism offers a re-interpretation of the past and tradition as a strategy. In this process, any nostalgia and sentimentality is avoided; as Frampton points out, ‘The fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism is to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place’. Moreover, what has interested me about Critical Regionalism in this research is the process of re-interpretation of traditional values, which will then be incorporated with universal value. As a result of this re-interpretation and mediatory position, the particularity of a given place will be discovered in built form and living environment. Another aspect of Critical Regionalism that makes it suitable for this research is its attention to the potentiality of all other human beings’ sensory contribution to understanding and the production of knowledge. In other words, it is not an ‘image-oriented’ or ‘vision-oriented’ strategy; rather, ‘its approach is inclusive as well as exclusive, in the sense that it absorbs the emerging modes of thought of the current epoch, but reinterprets them to chime with the specific character of the region’. Thus, it is a multi-sensory approach to urban design and architecture. In the case study Pardis Phase 11 a multi-sensory methodology was employed to explore, understand, reread and interpret the built form and space through sensory experience.


154 Shirazi, p. 41.
National and Universal Break with Tradition and Birth of Modernity

At this stage, I would like to investigate the roots and concept of modernity further. As noted in the previous chapter, the term modern has a long history. Different writers, critics and scholars of modernity like to associate it with different eras and centuries. For instance, it could be traced back to the 5th century, or to the time of European Renaissance; people in the 12th century, as well as in the late 17th century, considered themselves as modern, too. Although Modernism as a movement in the arts started around 1910, I would like to begin my investigation with the birth of modern science and the advancement of technology and progress of knowledge, which can be associated with European Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries. What was this Enlightenment? In 1784, when the German journal Berlin Monthly announced a competition to answer the question ‘was ist Aufklärung?’ (‘what is Enlightenment?’), Kant famously responded as follows:

Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: Sapere aude! Have courage to use your own understanding!

This immaturity for Kant is the inability to use one’s own understanding and judgement without the guidance of others. As the motto of Enlightenment suggests in the quote above, this becomes the period of using one’s own understanding and encouragement to become mature. This was to become known as the period of reason, and everything had to be examined and viewed

155 Foster, p. 2.
through the lens of reason. The belief was that human emancipation is only possible through reason. The importance of discussing these philosophical issues in the context of this research and the project of Pardis Phase 11 is that the effect of the Enlightenment project and its main emphasis on the use of reason laid the foundation for rationality as the basis of everything. Consequently, ‘in the planning and design of cities, the approach of modernism was based on the use of reason, to rationalize urban spatial structure’.\textsuperscript{157} For Amin, this period had a decisive impact on the modern world, as Enlightenment involved the birth of modernity, which was also the period of the birth of capitalism.\textsuperscript{158} Perhaps the matter of subjectivity/individualism is nothing other than the complex and contradictory changes produced by ‘modernity’: ‘the rapid expansion of capitalism, the emergence of modern individualism, the growing success of scientific method in manipulating nature for human ends, the decline of tradition’.\textsuperscript{159}

This revolution had major ramifications for all previous conceptions of societies, i.e., nature. As Amin observes, ‘the ethical principles based on divine legislation are, naturally, formulated by historical transcendental religions or philosophies, thereby opening the door to various through which constantly changing social realities are expressed’.\textsuperscript{160} Opening the door to various possibilities has also highlighted words like ‘identity’, ‘autonomy’, ‘individuality’ and ‘self-development’ that express a concern with being oneself. According to John Stuart Mill, ‘in things that do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself; the freest expression should be given to experiments in living, varieties of character and different modes of life’.\textsuperscript{161}

For example, the dominant belief that God created the universe, and humankind, no longer carries credibility (It does not mean that religion as a social form was eliminated totally, of course; religious belief in God is still strong

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[157] Madanipour, Design of Urban Space.
\item[158] Amin.
\item[160] Amin, p. 13.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
to this day). This interpretation had already brought the Enlightenment into conflict with the religious order of society. This attitude towards religion resulted in clashes between faith and reason and produced an irreverence toward religion and the church. Consequently, the modern concept of nature arose from the belief that the ‘realm of nature’ is opposed to the ‘realm of grace’. And, as Cassirer notes, ‘the former is communicated to us through sense perception and its supplementary process of logical judgement and inference, of the discursive of the understanding; the latter is accessible only through the power of revelation.’

This shift opened up room for Reason; people are freed from obligations based on the principles of divine legislation. As Amin notes, this meant that human beings, individually and collectively, can and must make their own history.

The concept of reason implies more than emancipation and understanding the disjunction between subjectivity and objectivity. All the thinkers referenced earlier questioned this concept of reason offering emancipation. In fact, this emancipation is limited by what the market and capitalism require or allow. The ‘Modern age was, above all, an age of paradox: an age in which the potentialities for the self-development of men had multiplied to infinity, while the range of their authentic self-expression had shrunk to nothing’. This social system, which aims to guarantee triumph with this concept of emancipation, has been seen as a good operational system of adequate institutions. It should be implemented in all societies as a high standard, and is the basis for American social thought. As Amin observes:

This system is based on the separation of the political domain from economic domain in social life. The “good institutions”, which must ensure the management of political life through reason, are those of democracy that guarantees the liberty and legal equality of individuals. In the management of

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163 Amin, p. 13.

economic life, reason demands that contractual freedom (in other words the
market) be the basis of relations of exchange and of the organization of the
division of labor between the individuals of which society is formed.\textsuperscript{165}

Additionally, Goldmann suggests ‘the enlightenment however is not merely the
battle against a faith shrunk to superstition and “science of God”. It is also a
conception of the world, a way of seeing man’s relation to the world in terms of
rational knowledge, \textit{pure insight}.\textsuperscript{166} By this he means that secularisation does
not necessarily mean the abolishment of all religious beliefs.
Enlightenment thinkers offered reason as strongly associated with
emancipation. However, this emancipation so far has had a bourgeois
characteristic within its internal structure, which is the limitation that
‘instrumental rationality’ imposes on the use of ‘public reason’. One essential
point to the bourgeois was the market economy in terms of exchange value. As
Goldmann elaborates:

\begin{quote}
The most important consequence of development of the market economy is
that the individual, who previously constituted a mere partial element within
the total social process of production and distribution, now becomes, both in
his own consciousness and in that of his fellow man, an independent element,
a sort of monad, a point of departure.\textsuperscript{167}
\end{quote}

This point of departure meant that the autonomous individual, who, as
mentioned above, was a partial element in a totality, is now on the verge of
progress. This model of progress blurs the relationship between human beings
and nature. As Koper remarks:

\begin{quote}
many have put in question western models of progress and denounced the
theocratic Prometheanism of the Enlightenment project and have argued
that the ‘anthropocentric’ privileging of our own species encouraged by its
‘humanism’ has been distorting of the truth of our relations with nature and
resulted in cruel and destructive forms of domination over it.\textsuperscript{168}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{165} Amin, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{166} Lucien Goldmann, \textit{The Philosophy of the Enlightenment: The Christian Burgess and the

\textsuperscript{167} Goldmann, p. 18.

The above passage indicates that the separation between humans and nature results in an object–subject relationship. Nature becomes an entity, that can be only regarded in terms of its purposes for human activity. I believe that through this process what humans make of nature is a projection of themselves and their own thought processes. In other words, if humans exploit nature as an object to be consumed, then they create an everyday life marked by the chaotic activity of individuals, industries, and states.

Islam, Enlightenment, and Progress

The European Enlightenment had an important effect on world intellectual history, laying the foundation for and shaping the rational understanding of the modern world. The religious view of the world was no longer a tool for interpreting the world. As a result, religion was pushed aside and gave way to new worldviews. However, in the Islamic world, scholars did not show the same level of doubt towards spiritual matters. Instead, they believed that a dialectical relationship between faith and reason could be maintained. As Akkach observes, ‘Islam did not encounter the same level of hostility from rationalists as Christianity did in Europe’. Islamic philosophy, unlike Enlightenment philosophy, did not enshrine conflict between religion and science. As the Egyptian scholar Ao Altwajiri explains, ‘Western enlightenment was completely opposed to religion and it still adopts the same attitude. Islamic enlightenment, on the contrary, combines belief and science, religion and reason, in a reasonable equilibrium between these components’.


This is still open for discussion. To study so-called Islamic philosophy is a monumental task and is not a focus of this research. Since there are many countries where Islam is the main religion, it is extremely difficult to cover the philosophical and intellectual production of these countries under Islamic philosophy. It is a common mistake to relate Islam only to the Arabic language. Although the Quran was written in Arabic, many thinkers did not write in Arabic and were not originally Arabs. As Leman reminds us, the ‘vast proportion of Islamic philosophy was written in languages other than Arabic, especially Persian, and by non-Arabs, and that continues to be the case today’.\(^{171}\) For instance, there is a school of philosophy in Iran that continues to this day. For example, cities such as Isfahan, Qom and Tehran are still very much indebted to the study of works by Islamic scholars such as Ibn Sina (the Latin Avicenna) and Al Farabi.

It is important to have a better understanding of Islamic philosophy. Nasr states that:

> Islamic philosophy, called falsafah and later hikmah, is an Islamic intellectual discipline in contention, debate, accord or opposition with other intellectual disciplines but in any case, it was and remains a part and parcel of Islamic intellectual life despite the opposition of many jurists.\(^{172}\)

Leading figures of the school of falsafah such as Mulla Sadra, al Farabi, din al Afghani and others were studying Greek thought, mostly Platonic and Aristotelian traditions, and bringing philosophical concerns and issues into their study. As Peters observes, ‘the Islamic philosopher, the faylasuf, was engaged in an inquiry that was numbered, together with the study of medicine, mathematics, astronomy and physics, among what were called the foreign sciences’.\(^{173}\) There is the other school of Islamic philosophy called kalam (usul al-figh), which focusses on religious studies and theology. Kalam in English literally means ‘speech’ or ‘words’. The kalam tradition was in opposition to falsafah and marginalised it in Islamic learning.


\(^{172}\) Leaman and Nasr, p. 11.

\(^{173}\) Leaman and Nasr, p. 40.
The term ‘Islamic philosophy’ might imply that it has been produced by and for Muslims alone. But this would be misleading; as Leman contends, ‘a good deal of Islamic philosophy was produced by non-Muslims, and some of it has no direct religious relevance anyway as the term religion is understood in the west today, so the religious provinces might be misleading too’. However, the fundamental principle of all religions is to claim that they have been revealed by God. In fact, a commonality between all religions is having a holy book of their own and claiming that theirs is the right path towards revelation.

Another prime example is theological speculation: proof of the existence of God had been a subject of study in the Islamic context. Yet this query is not specifically an Islamic issue, since many religious philosophies have also queried how it is possible to know God and His relationship to humanity and the world. It is clear by now that, throughout history, the question of the proper relationship between faith and reason has been present. Akkach states that ‘rational sensibilities emerged both in the Christian and Muslim worlds but evolved in different directions and with different pace and intensity’.

However, we can see that, in the history of Islamic philosophy, there was a school of thought that raised many concerns that later became associated with the enlightenment. Moreover, it would be a generalisation to make any claim regarding concepts in the context of Islamic philosophy. There are many Muslim countries with a long history of philosophy; for example, Islamic philosophy can be traced back in Persia (Iran), India, Turkey, Pakistan, the Arab world and even part of Russia. What this might mean here for us is that when a philosophy is called Islamic it does not necessarily mean that it has only produced treatises on religious arguments. As Leaman observes, it is quite the contrary: ‘when we are talking about Islamic philosophy, it is about philosophy appearing or influenced by the forms of thought currently at a particular time in Islamic world, and

\[174\] Leaman and Nasr, p. 1.

\[175\] Akkach, p. 52.
many philosophers are involved in discussions which have nothing to do at all with religion'.

For instance, in terms of scientific achievements, the 13th-century Syrian scholar and physician Ibn al Nafis discovered the circulation of the blood. His studies were based on a rejection of his predecessor Ibn Sina (Avicenna). There has been a tendency among many writers on the Global South and Islamic philosophy to regard their subject of study with colonial assumptions and treat it essentially as ‘other’. Edward Said published his critique of this view in his book Orientalism to show how some Western academics stereotyped the cultural practices of the Middle East. This goes hand in hand with seeing some cultures as superior. The distinction between East and West has been accepted by many—a way of thinking called ‘orientalism’. ‘Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between “the orient” and most of the time “the Occident”.’ For Said, this relationship between Occident and Orient is based on domination and complex hegemony. ‘A domination that identifies itself with “us” Europeans against all “those” non-Europeans, the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-Europeans people and cultures’. As a result, the assumption was made that it is Christianity that makes Europeans a distinct civilisation. The suggestion is that the biblical framework and Christianity should be the reference point; therefore, other cultures and theological revelations were ignored.

However, there are many religions and different interpretations of theological revelations. This research is concerned, though, with Islamic and Christian theology, in the context of the Enlightenment and the birth of modernity. Both Islamic and Christian metaphysics have been concerned with the reconciliation between religion and reason. In other words, the discussion of reason and acquiring knowledge other than via sacred texts was present in both philosophies. Both claim that there is no conflict between deductive reason and the holy book. However, the emphasis in religion is more on the power of the divine and revelation rather than the use of human reason. Amin also remarks that ‘all religious minds, including Christians and Muslims, end by renouncing

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176 Leaman and Nasr, p. 1147.
177 Said, p. 2.
178 Said, p. 7.
the exclusivity of reason in order to allow for divine inspirations, intuition, and feelings.\textsuperscript{179}

It should also be noted that, in terms of productive forces and mode of production, both religions relied on a tributary mode of production. This goes back to their predecessor of Hellenism. Amin sees medieval scholastic metaphysics taking four successive forms: Hellenistic, Eastern Christian, Islamic and Western Christian. Each has their own specific manifestation. Therefore, to put the periods and religions into a hierarchical classification or say that any of them has an intrinsic value that makes it superior does not make sense.

For example, Amin asserts, ‘one cannot establish any opposition between Greek thought (in order to make it the ancestor of modern European thought) and “oriental” thought (from which the Greek would be excluded)’.\textsuperscript{180} It is true that the Greeks produced significant scientific discoveries and made progress in mathematics and the philosophy of nature. But these discoveries are not only the results of Greek thought; Greece borrowed many things from other cultures. For example, the Egyptians’ calculus, Mesopotamian and Persian astronomy, or the writing of Ibn Khaldun on the scientific concept of history. In fact, the remarkable achievements of Islamic science cannot be denied, as George Sarton, in his encyclopaedic treatise on the history of science, emphasises that:

from the second half of the eight to the end of the eleventh century, Arabic was the scientific, the progressive language of mankind ... It will suffice here to evoke a few glorious names without contemporary equivalents in the West: Jabir ibn Hayan, al Kindi, al Khwarizmi, al Farghani Al Razi, Thabit ibn Qurra, al Battani, Hunain ibn Ishaq, al Farabi, ibrahim ibn Sinan, al Masudi, al Tabari, Abul- Wafa, Ali ibn Abas, Abul- Qasim, Ibn al jazzar, al Biruni, Ibn Sina, Ibn Yunus, al-Karkhi, Ibn al-Haytham, Ali ibn Isa, al Ghazali, al Zarqali, Omar Khayam... If anyone tells you that the middle ages were scientifically sterile, just quote these men to him, all of whom flourished within a relatively short period, between 750-1100.\textsuperscript{181}

\textsuperscript{179} Amin, p. 118.

\textsuperscript{180} Amin, p. 112.

A similar view was expressed by Ghiles in the journal *Nature*:

> At its peak about one thousand years ago, the Muslim world made a remarkable contribution to science, notably mathematics and medicine. Baghdad in its heyday and southern Spain built universities to which thousands flocked. Rulers surrounded themselves with scientists and artists. A spirit of freedom allowed Jews, Christian, and Muslims to work side by side. Today all this is but a memory.\(^{182}\)

It is worth giving attention to Islamic philosophical and scientific achievements. However, historically, the hostility and superiority shown by some Western scholars led to prejudice against the intellectual and scientific discoveries of Muslim scholars. For many years, Muslim scholars and theologians argued over scientific developments. For some Muslim *Ulama* (transmitters of *Ilm* or knowledge, they are teachers in the Muslim community who are also religious leaders), science, with its secular outlook, denies the presence of the divinity. These orthodox *Ulama* made the intellectual environment extremely difficult for those who studied science, philosophy and logic. A few of great avant-garde Muslim philosophers were Al Kindi (801–873 CE), Al Farabi (870–950) and Ibn Sina (980–1037). There was an understanding that they should make new laws to solve the issues of everyday life. These avant-gardists knew how to relativize ignorance and interpret the holy text to compensate for the inadequacies of the law (*sharia*). Most importantly, there was the possibility of separation between state and religion. But very often these thinkers were condemned as infidels (*Kafar*) and prosecuted, and their books burned. For instance, Al Kindi is considered the first Muslim philosopher, and was interested in all aspects of Greek philosophy. However, this is not to say that prior to Al Kindi there was no knowledge of Greek philosophy.\(^{183}\) Muslim theologians developed fragmentary or minor elements of Greek philosophy. However, it was Al Kindi who first aimed to explore the system of Greek philosophy as a whole.\(^{184}\)

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\(^{183}\) Leaman and Nasr.

\(^{184}\) Ibid.
Moreover, Al Kindi established a philosophical foundation that made it possible for other Muslim philosophers to access Greek philosophy and science. Al Kindi was determined to introduce Arab-speaking philosophers to the first translations of Greek philosophy. Al Kindi’s philosophical definitions were extracted from Greek literature and based on Aristotle’s works. His treatise, *On the Definitions and Descriptions of Things*, became an influential philosophical system for Al Farabi. It has been reported that Al Farabi studied logic in the school of Baghdad under the supervision of Christian scholars, and the Aristotelian *Organon* influenced his writings on logic and philosophy. Throughout his philosophical writings, a large part was dedicated to logic and linguistic topics. Al Farabi also made some important contributions related to epistemological issues.

The other prominent philosopher who has been considered to have influenced Islamic philosophy is Ibn Sina, also known as Avicenna. The most striking story about Ibn Sina’s life is that he completed his study of Islamic law, astronomy, logic, medicine, and the Quran by the age of 18. He selected from various sources, and in his philosophical system the traces of Plato, Aristotle, Galen, Al Farabi and other Greek and Islamic philosophers can be seen. *Al Qanun fil-tibb* or *The Canon of Medicine* is considered one of his most important works and was translated into Latin a few times. Other important philosophical topics that Ibn Sina covered include logic, physics, mathematics and metaphysics, which are discussed in his book *Al shifa* or *Healing*. Like for Al Kindi and Al Farabi, logic was a key element in Ibn Sina’s philosophical system, and he understood philosophy within the two branches of theoretical and practical.

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185 Ibid.

186 Ibid.

187 Ibid.

188 Ibid.

189 Ibid.

190 Ibid.
former deals with the knowledge of truth and the latter deals with knowledge to improve the soul.\textsuperscript{191} As mentioned earlier, these were avant-garde ideas in the Muslim world and Ibn Sina knew that there were inadequacies in the Islamic law which had to be modified and reinterpreted. However, these ideas did not fully develop as orthodox Muslim theologians refused to accept the influence of Hellenism on Islamic thought.

The European avant-gardists, however, were able to leave behind the old debate regarding the reconciliation of reason and faith and start a new one about reason and emancipation. Henceforth, Amin declares, ‘the task is to legitimise the new needs, which takes up the risk of inventing its laws and making its own future’.\textsuperscript{192} This prepared the path for secularisation and the abandonment of religious dogma. The Muslim world refused to accept this and as a result committed to absolutism. However, the assumption made by some European scholars that Enlightenment, modernity and scientific development are specific characteristics of Christianity and the superiority of the European mind is absolutely flawed and full of prejudice. For instance, prominent German sociologist Max Weber’s work influenced oriental studies in the West. As Hoodbhoy reminds us, Weber’s ‘principal contention was that Islam, as a religion of warriors, produced an ethic fundamentally incompatible with a rational capitalist society. Yet without this rational ethic, a society is doomed to a mediaeval existence’.\textsuperscript{193} Logic, scientific knowledge and questions concerning the reconciliation between reason and faith were familiar themes for Muslim scholars. In relation to modernity, the mode of production, economic systems and the capitalist socioeconomic sector, they, too, were advanced and had their own system of commerce. I shall discuss these briefly in the Islamic context in the following pages.

The description of capitalist socioeconomic systems has been related to societies in which particular capitalist relations are predominant. ‘Thus, in particular, this description has been applied to Western European society (with its American extension) the beginnings of the nineteenth century, the sixteenth century, etc’.\textsuperscript{194} These capitalist relations can be interpreted firstly as a specific mode of

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{192} Amin, p. 51.


production, that is an economic model in accordance with mass production. Secondly, as a private ownership of means of production in which the owners pay the workers for their labour. And thirdly, as an 'economic system in which the capitalist sector occupies a predominant place, and by an ideological and industrial superstructure corresponding to this'.\textsuperscript{195} In each of these descriptions of capitalism, one thing is apparent: exchange. As Ellen Meiksins Wood reminds us:

Capitalism is a system in which goods and services, down to the most basic necessities of life, are produced for profitable exchange, where even human labour-power is a commodity for sale in the market, and where all economic actors are dependent on the market. This is true not only of workers, who must sell their labour-power for wage, but also of capitalists, who depend on the market to buy their inputs, including labour-power, and to sell their output for profit.\textsuperscript{196}

This particular way of organising material life for the needs of human beings for profitable exchange is a fundamental principle of capitalism. However, this form of economic activity (profitable exchange and private ownership of property) can be traced back to other eras. Marx, in his \textit{Capital} Volume III says that ‘not commerce alone, but also merchant’s capital, is older than capitalist mode of production. And is, in fact, historically the oldest free state of existence of capital’.\textsuperscript{197} Later on, he notes that ‘in all previous modes of production merchant’s capital appears to perform the function par excellence of capital’.\textsuperscript{198} Sufficient conditions for commercial capital activity must be based on the expectation of making profit. In other words, as Rodinson explains:

\textsuperscript{195} Rodinson, pp. 32–33.


In this sense capitalism and capitalistic enterprises, even with a considerable rationalization of capitalistic calculations, have existed in all civilized countries of the earth. In China, India, Babylon, Egypt, Mediterranean Antiquity, and in the Middle Ages, as well as modern times.\textsuperscript{199}

From the passage above, it is easy to see that some kind of capitalist activity that rests on the expectation of profit has existed in most societies. Additionally, the Muslim world is no exception to the economic activities and characteristics that have been discussed so far. The prescriptions of Islam are written in the Quran. Nowhere in that book is there a prohibition against the ownership of private property or wage labour.\textsuperscript{200} There is no conflict between practising the religion and having an interest in material life; even doing business and making a profit during religious pilgrimages is allowed.\textsuperscript{201} Without doubt. in Muslim countries the capitalist sector was well organised in various ways; by buying and selling goods, they simply intended to increase their profit and capital. The fourteenth-century Muslim historian Ibn Khaldoun gave an invaluable definition of trade amongst the Muslims as follows:

It should be known that commerce means the attempts to make a profit by increasing capital, through buying goods at a low price and selling them at a high price, whether these goods consist of slaves, grains, animals, weapons, or clothing material. The accrued [amount] is called profit [\textit{ribh}]. The attempt to make such a profit may be undertaken by storing goods and holding them until the market has fluctuated from low prices to high prices. This will bring a large profit. or the merchant may transport his goods to another country where they are more in demand than in his own, where he bought them. This again will bring a large profit. Therefore, an old merchant said to a person who wanted to find out the truth about commerce: ‘I shall give it to you in two words: Buy cheap and sell dear. There is commerce for you’. By this he meant the same thing that we have just established.\textsuperscript{202}

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\textsuperscript{199} Rodinson, p. 36.
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\textsuperscript{200} Rodinson, p. 41.
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\textsuperscript{201} Rodinson, p. 42.
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This quotation makes it clear that, in the Muslim world, merchants and traders knew a substantial amount about economic activity and the capitalist mode of production. Also, there was a capitalist sector in the Islamic countries, and it was very advanced in certain periods in different countries. However, this is not to say that an industrial capitalist socioeconomic system as it is known today existed in the Middle Ages. Rather, ‘the economic structure of the mediaeval Muslim world was broadly comparable to that of Europe in the same period’. Modern industrial capitalism developed more rapidly in the West, but this cannot be attributed to Western primacy over Asians, Africans and other non-Europeans. Cultural chauvinists who think of the West as a culture with higher development of rationality and such as the Weberian claims reported above, are empty of intellectually invalid and racist. As Wood states:

No serious historian today would deny the importance of trade and technology in Asia and other parts of the non-European world, or, for that matter, the relatively modest level of development attained by Europeans before the rise of capitalism.

Of course, in these accounts the Europeans have been successful in removing obstacles that impede progression and economic development. It is also true that Islamic societies fell behind in terms of the development of modern science and technology. However, many historical factors contributed to the disruption of the scientific and technological development of Muslim societies. In searching for reasons for the scientific and technological underdevelopment, as Hoodbhoy notes:

one must recognize at the outset that the environment for science in Islamic countries today is replete with paradoxes. On the one hand, all these countries are in the full grip of Western technology and market-based consumerism, which are the product of scientific revolution. But on the other

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203 Rodinson, p. 157.
204 Wood, p. 80.
hand, technology and the market bring about homogenization and threaten old collective identities.\(^{205}\)

These paradoxes are apparent in most Muslim countries. Today, modernity, rationalisation and secularity in most Muslim countries such as Iran constitute global capitalism and universal market consumerism, without considering emancipatory principle. Amin believes that ‘political Islam objects to the concept of emancipatory modernity and rejects the very principle of democracy, the right for society to construct its own future through the freedom that it gives itself to legislate’.\(^{206}\)

Modernity was once based on individuality, democracy, freedom from obligation, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, being autonomous institutions, and the notion that human beings, individually and collectively, are capable of making their own history. What once constituted modernity—capitalism, democracy, and secularism—are no longer the products of a natural progression and development. Nor are they specific characteristics of the ‘genius of Christianity’.\(^{207}\) As Žižek says, the internal marriage between capitalism and democracy has been broken and is approaching divorce.\(^{208}\) What this means is that today capitalism flourishes in countries that have been claiming to be anti-capitalist. They also have become representative of capitalism and imitating Western consumerism culture. For instance, Iranian urban development, city planning and housing architecture imitate Western consumer culture.

The religious leaders and ulama that during the Iranian revolution in 1979 claimed to be anti-capitalist have now become agents of the bourgeoisie and participants in global capitalism and modernity. It should be mentioned that the other side of modernity’s coin, which is the emphasis on individual autonomy and emancipatory aspects of modern life, is completely ignored. The Islamic republic has not called into question Western capitalist concepts such as ‘progress’, ‘development’, ‘urban design’ and ‘housing architecture’. As Amin

\(^{205}\) Hoodbhoy, p. 28.

\(^{206}\) Amin, p. 75.

\(^{207}\) Amin, pp. 26–27.

\(^{208}\) Slavoj Žižek, China, ‘Asian Capitalism’ and Our Lack of Ideology, online video recording, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ADfH9Rt6pI&t=29s [accessed 14 June 2018].
asserts, ‘the regime rapidly began to demonstrate that it was incapable of rising to the challenge of innovative economic and social development’. Moreover, most land and natural resources is used for urban development, and housing construction sites are managed by religious and military leaders.

Despite the anti-imperialist rhetoric and anti-monarchy stance from which the ulama derived their legitimacy, the Ayatollahs laid a political Islamic foundation with a main principle known as *Velayat-e-faghih*.

*Velayat-e-faghih* or ‘Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist’ is a concept that was introduced by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian revolution in 1979. In *Shia Islam*, the concept gives the Islamic Jurist or *Faghih* custodianship over people. However, there is disagreement amongst the Ulama as to how this custodianship should be interpreted and implemented. For instance, one school of thought is that the guardianship of the Islamic Jurist should be limited to non-litigious matters, whereas the other school believes in the absolute guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, which implies that it should control all issues and spheres of society. In the Iranian context, the Guardian jurist or *Vali-ye faghih* serves the role of Superman or Leader of the government. Additionally, disagreement between the Ulama over the limited or absolute implementation of guardianship resulted in the persecution of many Ulamas who favoured the limited version of the concept.

It seems that revolution only changed the absolute form of power in the monarchy system, where the Shah/King was the head of state with fundamental religious absolutism in power, where the supreme leader (*Velayat-e-faghih*) became the head of state. Furthermore, the Ayatollahs desired more political power and established ideological authority for managing society. In fact, the religious leaders’ anti-capitalism slogan is empty of content and not in conflict with global capitalism. Amin observes that:

> The two discourses of global liberal capitalism and political Islam are not in conflict with one another, but, on the contrary, perfectly complementary.

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209 Amin, p. 81.
The ideology of American-style communitarianism, which is fashionably popularized today, eliminates social consciousness and struggle and replaces them with supposed collective identities, which are indifferent to such things. This ideology is, thus, used in capital’s strategy of domination because it transfers struggles from real social contradictions to the world of the so-called cultural imagination, which is transhistorical and absolute. Political Islam is precisely a communitarianism.²¹⁰

There have been numerous studies dealing with the whys and hows of the Iranian revolution. What were its roots? Or, as Keddie puts it: ‘Was this revolution religious, political, social, economic, -or what’?²¹¹

Similarly, other scholars have written historical surveys relating to international and internal political affairs. Some analyse politics and Iran’s relationship with Western countries, particularly the United States.²¹² A number of studies and artistic projects have focussed on Iranian cities’ urban form and housing architecture. However, there is a considerable gap in the literature for visual studies and educational research on socio-spatial and artistic practices within these cities. There are a few works, such as Pamela Karimi’s book Alternative Iran: Contemporary Art and Critical Spatial Practice (2022), that investigate the connection with space and site in contemporary Iranian art practices. What makes Karimi’s work interesting is that she ‘describes artistic works and genres that are informal, unofficial, countercultural, oppositional, defiant, or activist’.²¹³ Karimi does this by situating these artistic genres within the framework of critical spatial practice. Yet, many of the existing studies describe the cities’ histories, palaces and the lives of their founders, without any critical discussion of their forms, social function and domestic practices within these cities and houses.

One objective of this research is to serve as a platform for further study to fill this gap. It is an attempt to study traditional Iranian urban forms, architectural forms expressed in houses, and current architectural forms primarily from a

²¹⁰ Amin, p. 82.


²¹² Abrahamian, Iran between Two Revolutions, pp. 4–5.

critical spatial point of view. This study aims to celebrate the interdisciplinary exchange between Art and Urban studies, art and life. I refer to ‘critical spatial practice’, which allows us to examine works/projects that transgress the limits of art and architecture to engage with both the social and aesthetic, the public and private.
The Concept of Nature in the Context of Urban Space

This chapter offers a critical examination of the notion of nature as seen by the Christian religious-philosophical tradition and by Islam, as compared with the modern idea of nature. While I am very much mindful of the complexity and ambiguity surrounding the concept of nature, the intention is to explicate its relationship to other concepts, including those of urban space and place. Moreover, I lay out considerations regarding the production and ideology of nature, which will create a philosophical foundation for discussing the conventional capitalist separation between nature and society. I am very much aware that other religions and indigenous knowledge view nature utterly differently from what will be discussed in this thesis. Or. what might be considered worthy of the name of nature within one culture might appear insignificant and meaningless to members of other cultures. For example, as Amos Rapoport states in *Australian Aborigines and the Definition of Place* about the different ways in which aborigines and European view nature:

Many Europeans have spoken of the uniformity and featurelessness of the Australian landscape. The aborigines, however, see the landscape in a totally different way. Every feature of the landscape is known and has meaning—they then perceive differences which the European cannot see. These differences may be in terms of detail or in terms of a magical and invisible landscape, the symbolic landscape being even more varied than the perceived physical space. As one example, every individual feature of Ayer’s Rock is linked to a significant myth and the mythological beings who created it. Every tree, every stain, hole and fissure has meaning. Thus what to a European is an empty land may be full of noticeable differences to the aborigines and hence rich and complex.

The passage quoted above is an excellent example of how nature and physical space can be full of significance. It is problematic to attempt to define other cultures’ spaces within one’s own standards and culture. Moreover, the arguments produced around the idea of nature are so vast and complicated that it would be beyond the capacity of this thesis to give a historical account of the concept of nature. This chapter should be considered a general introduction to the understanding of nature from particular perspectives such as Christianity.

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and Islam and, further, the modern conception of nature, which also coincides with the birth of modernity and capitalism.

With the emergence of industrial capitalism and developing technological capabilities, human beings’ domination over nature increased. The duality between nature and man, and the idea that nature is a gift from God, became generally accepted. Nature was considered as a separate entity to humankind; as the raw material for building human societies and cities.

With the growth of industrial society in the 19th and 20th centuries, through human labour and with the aid of technical process and scientific information, the fabric of cities started to go through major changes. Human intellectual capacity became the ultimate rational tool for creating new urban cities.

I will not be defending a particular philosophy of nature. However, this study rests on these debates and at times refers to them. The topic of nature, actual and theoretical, runs through the entire fabric of Western philosophy and thought. My interest here is primarily with the politics and ideological use of nature/space, especially in the context of urban places and cities. After all, the main component of urban space is the physical environment, i.e., nature. It is important to understand the ideological use of nature, as it shows how we think about nature and what are our values in organising our built environment and shaping our cities. As White reminds us:

> What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny- that is, by religion ... our daily habits of action, for example, are dominated by an implicit faith in perpetual progress.²¹⁵

With the word ‘ecology’ here it might seem that White is talking about a specialised field like marine biology or people who specifically have been trained as ecologists.

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In fact, most of us do not necessarily do anything directly related to ecology. What White might be suggesting here instead in using the word ecology is that what people do in relation to their environment depends on their ideas about themselves in relation to their place of living. It is therefore essential that, before the study of the city and urban form, one starts with the study of nature. I attempt to show that the problems of nature, urban form and cities are strongly connected.

Search for the Meaning of Nature

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘nature’ as the phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and products of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations. The problem with this definition lies in the last part, in which humans and human creation have been excluded from nature. As a result, ‘nature’ appears as an external force to human beings. What we tend to think of as nature is hills, mountains, rivers, wildlife and forests. Perceiving nature as such indicates that we see nature outside of us, with a separation between subject and object—that is, between man and the natural world. Furthermore, *nature* in old French (Latin *nātūra*) is the conditions of birth, quality, character or natural order; the world that is equivalent to *nāt(us)* (past participle of *nāsci*, to be born) + -ūra -ure.\(^{216}\)

However, these definitions may seem a simplistic way of interpreting and viewing nature. For Raymond Williams, nature is one of the most complex words in the language.\(^{217}\) Yet, like many other terms, its difficulty is determined by our use of it in a multiplicity of frameworks. As Soper confirms, ‘Nature carries an immensely complex and contradictory symbolic load; it is the subject of very contrary ideologies; and it has been represented in an enormous variety of different ways’.\(^{218}\) Indeed, in recent years nature has been on the political, social and financial agenda of many countries as a result of climate change, which has made us rethink our understanding, our use of natural resources and our relationship with other forms of life.


\(^{218}\) Soper, p. 2.
Some large companies have put green marketing, nature, animal conservation and climate change on their priority list to show their awareness of the issues. For example, to reduce their environmental footprint, the beer company Carlsberg introduced plastic-free beer packaging. Or the clothing company Lacoste swapped their crocodile logo for images of endangered animals. These T-shirts were limited edition; the company stated that ‘the number of polos made of each species represents the number remaining in the wild’. Although these attempts can be seen as inspiring and positive, they can also be read more cynically as companies finding an opportunity to take advantage of the concept of nature and use green connotations for their own marketing purposes. Žižek sees these strategies as another way of using nature and conservation projects to compensate for feeling guilty about consumerism.

Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration to say that we are annihilating our environment through a specific ideological and political approach to nature. There have been many movements such as critical theory, Marxist theory, socialist, feminist and green Movements that all have been highly critical of Western models of progress and have sought to reveal the oppressive magnitude of the reliance on scientific rationality.

All these groups and school of thoughts, as Soper observes,

have criticised Western ‘instrumental rationality’ as responsible for abusive and alienating exploitations of the environments and its other life forms and have argued that its scientific approach must yield to more proper sense of our actual dependency on the ecosystem and of our organic ties and affinities with the earth and its various species.

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221 Soper, p. 5.
This exploitation of other life forms for our own ends has resulted in the destruction of many natural resources. Moreover, the notion that human beings are superior has also contributed to our abusive behaviour towards other creatures. For instance, in the agricultural sector, whether it be crops or animals, we are facing devastating problems. As Lewallen states:

Forests have been inundated with defoliating chemicals. Crops have been destroyed with killing sprays. Rice caches have been destroyed. Landing zones have been blasted in the forests, adding to the countless crates gouged by bombs and shells directed at the insurgent himself. Huge bulldozers known as Rome ploughs have stripped roadsides and curved grids in jungles.  

There is no doubt that the relationship between human beings and nature is problematic. This is well known to most of us in the context of climate change and global warming. Moreover, as I write, we are in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, which will change people’s way of life and relationships for years to come. Perhaps this shows that different discourses can be examined in the context of the concept of nature. However, this artistic research is concerned with nature in two religious systems, Christian and Islamic, and the modern idea of nature in the European Enlightenment, which I have discussed earlier in this thesis. Therefore, in the following sections I proceed to discuss how nature has been conceived of in Christianity and Islam.

**Nature in Christianity**

It has been common to view nature as something outside of human beings and external to humanity, in which we are nothing but an insignificant member of a large totality. This separation can be traced back to the religious view of the world and nature. Christianity, Islam and Judaism all have the common view that God is the creator of the world and humanity. Humankind and nature depend on God for their existence. God's existence is independent of the world, and only depends on God itself. The independent existence of nature and its dependence on God creates

a contrast. This contrast between God and nature is succeeded by that of man and nature. According to the First article of the 39 articles of the Church of England:

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body parts, or passions, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in the unity of this Godhead, there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the father, the son, and the holy ghost.

What this statement is suggesting is that God exists, and this existence is of the highest value. God is the creator, and everything in the world is dependent on God. As Renou notes, ‘God is eternal and exists beyond time, while nature is temporal and is subject to change; God is the creator of nature’. According to this view, everything in the world—animals, plants, all entities, dead or alive, man included— are determined by God’s will or the natural law of cause and effect. This determination from God’s will means that He is the creator of all things. Erich notes that:

Creation in the traditional religious sense, on the other hand means something quite different. It means the bringing forth of Something out of nothing, absolute origination... for we assume that the world and man have been created by God, neither the world nor man can be independent in their existence but must be relative, contingent, accidental.

According to this view, everything that takes place in the realm of nature is determined either by God’s will or by the chain of cause and effect. Therefore, as Renou remarks, ‘this view can be expressed in the single proposition that nature

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224 Renou, p. 5.

is a mechanism’. This dependency of man’s existence on God denotes the symbolical relationship between God and humanity. Moreover, in the Christian doctrine, *imago Dei* (the image of God) is a term that has its roots in the biblical book of Genesis, wherein God says:

> Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So, God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.  

What can be understood from the passage above is that man is like God and possesses God-like characteristics. As Renou explains, ‘if man is like God, he must transcend nature, man’s transcendence of nature is parallel to God’s transcendence of nature in at least two respects: first, that man is eternal, and secondly, that he is freedom’. In addition to the fact of human freedom and the causality of his own free will, which raises him above nature, humanity becomes the master and conqueror of nature. As a result of this domination over nature, a particular form of duality arises: mankind versus nature. Mankind is the ruler and molester of nature, which means that people can do whatever suits their needs. This domination can also be found in man’s relationship with animals. In Genesis, animals were ordered to obey people, who were created as God’s representatives.

In his book *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, Derrida refers to man’s domination over animals in Genesis: ‘To obey he is required to mark his ascendancy, his domination over them, indeed, his power to tame them’. Derrida looks at this domination in the two narratives. In the first narrative or version, ‘God commands man-women to command the animals, but not yet name them’. In the second narrative or version, something interesting happens—something that Derrida reminds us is worthy of contemplation, but is often ignored—the naming of the animals without the women.

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226 Renou, p. 5.


228 Renou, p. 6.

As Derrida observes: ‘The original naming of the animals does not take place in the first version. It isn’t the man-women of the first version but men alone and before women who, in that second version, gives their names to the animals’. He lets only the man, man alone, indulge in naming all the creatures. Moreover, Derrida puts the emphasis on ‘in order to see’ in both narratives; he remarks that God created animals and nature before man was created. As he reminds us:

He summons them in order to subject them to man’s command, in order to place them under man’s authority. More precisely, he has created man in his likeness so that man will subject, tame, dominate, train, or domesticate the animal born before him and assert his authority over them. God destines the animal to an experience of the power of man, in order to see the power of man in action, in order to see the power of man at work, in order to see man take power over all the other living beings.

What I understand from Derrida’s reading is that in both narratives God subjects animals to man in order to see what he calls them and what will happen to all creatures on the earth and the earth itself. Furthermore, Derrida notes that:

God lets Ish call the other living things all on his own, give them their names in his own name, these animals that are older and younger than him, these living things that came into the world before him but were named after him, on his initiative, according to the second narrative. In both cases, man is in both senses of the word after the animal.

What interests me the most in Derrida’s reading is this ‘after’; on the one hand, existentially speaking, people appear on the earth after nature and all other animals (according to Christian theology and in Genesis, human beings were created on the sixth day of creation). On the other hand, people always try to reach, change, train and domesticate animals and nature. Perhaps it can be said that the idea of the mastery of humans over nature and animals is nothing other

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230 Derrida, p. 15.
231 Derrida, p. 16.
232 Derrida, p. 17.
than an illusion. As discussed in the introduction, with the European Enlightenment and the birth of modernity, human beings’ relationship with nature and other creatures changed. It seemed that mastery over nature and other creatures for the production of capital accumulation and exchange value became an accepted reality. However, people should be wary of the deeper connotations of words and concepts such as mastery, control, production and victory in relation to nature and other living creatures. In his book *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels issues a reminder: ‘let not us, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human conquest over nature. For each such conquest takes its revenge on us’.\(^{233}\) As Engels further expounds:

> We are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature-but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly.\(^{234}\)

My understanding of Derrida’s analysis of the relationship between people and nature, and Engels’s observation of the human relationship with and treatment of nature, is that human beings are part of nature. And there should not be a separation, there should be no standing outside of nature, as we all are part of nature.

Having dipped into the Christian view of nature and its impact on our treatment of nature, it is necessary here to analyse the religious view of nature from the point of view of Islam. I hope to show that this perception of separation is also present in the Islamic view of humanity and the environment. As has been mentioned earlier, there is no difference between the Christian and Islamic religious views of the natural world.


\(^{234}\) Ibid.
Nature in Islam

Muslims believe that God’s (Arabic Allah) communication was revealed through Muhammad via the angel Gabriel. The holy book Quran is the final revelation of God to Muslims. Moreover, the cosmological sciences in Islam are closely related to the revelation, as God reveals his existence through his creation of the world, such that learning about the truth and God becomes possible through the study of nature and cosmology. Nasr asserts that ‘revelation in its manifested aspect, is the form while the mental and psychic structure of the people who receive it acts as the matter upon which this form is imposed’.\(^{235}\) According to this view, society comes into existence from the intertwining of form and matter, which is highly dependent on the social behaviour of the people who are its receivers.

Nasr’s suggestion is that, in this manner, ‘the revelation is already spoken in the language of the people for whom it is meant, as the Quran insists so often; and the second, that matter of this civilisation plays a role in its crystallisation and further growth’.\(^{236}\) Therefore, revelation in Islam came in the form of a sacred book, the holy Quran, whose importance was crucial in all aspects of Islamic society and more specifically in the perception of nature. However, Muslim vocabulary to express and address concepts related to the cosmological sciences varied. For instance, the Arabic word for nature that came to be used is tabiah. Early Arabic translators also occasionally used the term kiyān from the Syriac kjono to be synonymous with tabiah.\(^{237}\) Although the word tabiah is nowhere to be seen in the Quran, tab is used several times. The word tab, as Nasr observes, ‘is interpreted by both Sunni and Shia [two Islamic communities] commentators to mean veil which separates man from God’.\(^{238}\) It is worth noting that the separation of God from man and God from nature that was discussed

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\(^{236}\) Nasr, Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines.

\(^{237}\) Ibid, pp. 8–9.

\(^{238}\) Nasr, Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines, pp. 9–10.
earlier regarding Christianity and nature is also present in Islam. Furthermore, the contrast between the creator and the world of nature has been expressed by Muslim authors with the use of terms such as *haqq* (creator) and *khalq* (humanity).

The separation between *haqq* and *khalq* has been emphasised in various ways in different schools of Islam. The absolute transcendence of God, for example, in the Sunni school is seen to such a degree that nature belongs to a distinct domain of reality in comparison to the absolute power of the *haqq* (creator). In other schools of Islam—for example, Sufism—the *hakims* (Theosophers) were followers of a combination of peripatetic philosophy and *Ishraqi* (discussed below), whose leading figure was Mulla Sadra. Sufis and Ishraqi were interested in other aspects of the relationship between the divine and its manifestations.

However, in the Islamic study of nature and cosmological sciences, by the time of the establishment of the Abbasid caliphate in 750 CE, many translations of works on the various sciences had become available. With all these new sources from Greek, Pahlavi and Sanskrit, there arose a new school of sciences that also had non-Islamic sources in their hands. For instance, the ‘school of logic and rationalism, astronomy and mathematics and finally the followers of Greek and Alexandrian sciences which were connected to the Sabaean community in Harran’. This school of thought came to be known as the *Mutazilites* or the rational school of Islamic philosophy, which was mostly influenced by Greek philosophy.

However, as discussed earlier in the section of Islam and the Enlightenment, the rationalist school of philosophy always struggled against its counterpart school of Ishraqi and Sufis. Although these schools had their differences, they shared the same attitude when it came to issues surrounding the separation or unity of the spiritual and material world. Furthermore, rational human faculty, which is a reflection of human reason, does not lead to separation between *haqq* (creator) and *khalq* (humanity), or between God and nature. It rather leads to *tawhid* (unity); ‘reason, therefore, when not impeded by external obstacles does not lead to rationalism in the modern sense of the word, that is, a negation of all principles transcending human reason’.

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Additionally, the 4th/10th and 6th/12th centuries were periods of great activity in the formation of Islamic art, sciences and philosophy. One very important school of thought, known as the Illuminationists or Ishraqi, was established by Suhrawardi and his followers. One of the prominent figures of this school whose influence upon intellectual life is still noticeable to this day in Iran is Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, commonly known as Mulla Sadra. According to Nasr, we can say that ‘the dominant perspectives in Islamic history touching upon the study of nature are those of mathematician, Hermeticists, Peripatetics, Isma’ili’s, Illuminationists, Sufis and finally the Theologians, the majority of whom have followed a philosophy of nature in which nature and natural cause are absorbed into the divine omnipotence’.

To understand the concept of nature in Islam, it is crucial to identify the place and period under study. As mentioned above, there have been different periods and different schools of thought, while the most essential division in Islam is in terms of the interpretation of Islamic revelation. For instance, the Sufis, and in particular the school of Ibn Arabi, a combination of the two philosophical perspectives of the peripatetics and Ishraqi was taught. In this school of thought, the relationship between Haqq (the creator) and Khalq (humanity or community), or in other words the relationship between the two worlds of spirituality and materiality, was seen to be continuous as well as separate. As Nasr also elucidates:

The continuity between the two was stressed inasmuch as this relation is as real as the discontinuity considered by the theologians. One can say on the one hand that infinite is absolutely separate from the finite, or the creator from creation; and on the other, that since there cannot be two absolutely distinct orders of reality- this view being considered as shirk (polytheism)- the finite must somehow be none other than the infinite.

Although separation between God and humanity is present in the thinking of the Ishraqi and the Sufis, the material world is nothing but a shadow and symbol of

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the spiritual world. In addition to this separation, they ‘without denying the absolute transcendence of God, have emphasised the reality of the material world through the use of symbolism (Tashbih).’ Moreover, the spiritual and material (tashbih and tanzih) worlds and immanence or transcendence are considered together to avoid any separation. As mentioned above, to prevent this separation and bridge the gap, Islamic scholars, philosophers and theologians emphasised the idea of unity (tawhid). This became the fundamental principle of Islamic philosophy. In the context of Iranian art and architecture, tawhid plays an important role. As Nasr observes, ‘Persian architecture of Islamic period has sought to integrate all of its features to lead to this unity’. Therefore, traditional Islamic art and architecture are the material manifestation of its cosmology; ‘the cosmos reflects the Divine Principle and so does man. Therefore, man himself is intimately related to the cosmos’. According to this, people are a part of this cosmos; therefore, their action and activity on the earth is the reflection of a higher reality. On this basis, in the context of this thesis, the Islamic philosophy of nature, and thus traditional Islamic architecture, is meant to be a reflection of the relationship between the cosmos and mankind, which manifests itself in unity or tawhid.

However, the intention of this section is to consider various Islamic intellectual perspectives on the subject of nature. It is beyond the capacity of this research to shed light on the entire philosophy of nature and cosmological sciences. I believe that how nature and space are viewed determines how life, cities and places of dwelling are organised. As this thesis is concerned with spatial structure and urban form, it seemed necessary to me to discuss the concept of nature in order to understand why particular urban spaces and forms became dominant. It is difficult to look at urban design without perceiving a more rapid pattern of restructuring geographical urban space than ever before. As Neil Smith indicates:

> Deindustrialization and regional decline, gentrification and extra metropolitan growth, the industrialization of the Third World and new international division of labour, intensified nationalism and a new geopolitics

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245 Ardalan and Bakhtiar, p. xii.

246 Ibid.
of war—these are not separate developments but symptoms of much deeper transformation in the geography of capitalism.\textsuperscript{247}

In all of these views of nature, there is a complex dualism. In fact, the subject of nature threads through the entire human history and has been the object of study in various religions. Therefore, it is beyond the capacity of this research to trace the entire historical development up to our own time. However, my main interest is to illustrate these ideological uses of nature by examining two particular modes of thinking about and experiencing nature: ‘instrumental rationality’ or, for lack of a better description, the bourgeois ideology of nature, which arose in the 17th and 18th century in Europe with the birth of modernity and industrial capitalism. As a result of this, and following the development of new modes of transportation, there was frantic movement towards a future in which man could achieve anything. As Bianca observes:

\begin{quote}
In fact, the disrupted connections between man and earth, as those between man and heaven, now permitted everything to be converted into quantitative values. The resources of the soil, accessible by potent methods of exploitation and processed in large industrial plants, allowed the invested capital to work and accumulate, producing previously unknown concentrations of economic power. Modern means of transportation encouraged the independent, setting up of manufacturing facilities, fostered demographic and economic segregation, created urban development pressures and fuelled real-estate speculation.\textsuperscript{248}
\end{quote}

As a result of these events, the old pattern of organising life and the urban form in large European cities was destroyed. Moreover, the rapid development of industrial societies in Europe and the breaking of cultural traditions generated the modern Western concepts of ‘urban design’, ‘modern city planning’ and ‘progress’. A prime example of this process is the transformation of Paris by Baron Haussmann between 1853 and 1869. Other cities such as London and Vienna also underwent major redesign in the second half of the 19th century. In

\textsuperscript{247} Neil Smith, pp. 1–2.  
\textsuperscript{248} Bianca, pp. 162–63.
the following section, I will discuss the modern concept of nature and these changes in more detail.

**Modern Concept of Nature**

In this section, my objective is to understand the modern concept of nature within the framework of European modernity, i.e., capitalism. I suspect that the idea of nature has a specific meaning under the capitalist mode of production. I believe that nature under capitalism, which solely focuses on exchange value and economic development, leads to the production of a rational physical and social landscape. As a result, all aspects of human life come under the influence of commodity exchange. In other words, capital exists in many different forms and productive assets such as land, the built environment, means of communication and means of transportation. The story of urbanisation and rational methods of city planning is central and intertwined with how nature is viewed and how the urban landscape is produced. My focus on nature is meant to allow us to trace back and examine the set of processes that shape cities and places of human dwelling.

It was as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe that the power of human understanding and knowledge seemed to be approaching the illimitable. The classical and mediaeval conception of the world started to disintegrate, and human beings rushed to change the order of things. During this time, our conception of time and space was no longer tied to the classical cosmology that was evident in Plato’s doctrine. This led to a new outlook. In fact, the subject of nature in its modern conception owes a great deal to both classical and mediaeval cosmology. According to Collingwood, ‘in the history of European thought there have been three periods of constructive cosmological thinking; three periods, that is to say, when the idea of nature has come into the focus of thought, become the subject of intense and protracted reflection’.

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With the emergence of the modern view of nature, the birth of industrial capitalism and the global transformation of our planet, domination over nature became a reality. Whether this domination is destructive or a sign of human development is a matter for debate. Whichever side we take, our conception of nature is not simple at all. Nature can be seen as spiritual and God-given, as in the Greeks’ view of nature; it can be intelligent and in motion; it can be mechanical and devoid of intelligence and rationality; it can be given as raw material for our total consumption; it can appear to us as sublime; or it can be designed into gardens and national parks. However, the modern concept of nature is seen as early as the 17th century and goes into the 18th century, with the birth of modernity and capitalism.

For Collingwood, the modern European view of nature is part of a historical narrative that owes much to Greek and Renaissance cosmology, although there are fundamental differences between these belief systems. As Collingwood indicates:

> Modern cosmology could only have arisen from a widespread familiarity with historical studies, and in particular with historical studies of the kind which placed the conception of process, change, development in the centre of their picture and recognized it as a fundamental category of historical thought.

Modern cosmological thinking in the 18th century developed around the idea of progress, and its further development and growth were tied to Enlightenment thinking. Based on the analogy of progress and development, this new conception, based on the growing success of the scientific method in manipulating nature for human ends and developments, became the dominant characteristic of the modern view of nature. Thus, the new conception claims to be a universal law and ‘contains both the impulse toward the particular, the concrete, and the factual and the impulse toward the absolutely universal’.

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252 Collingwood, p. 10.

This view resulted in an evolutionary view of nature, in which everything is in a state of constant change that leads to something new. Moreover, the domination of scientific methods for the transformation of nature under the flag of human progress has become an accepted reality. As Neil Smith explains: ‘For apologist and detractor alike, the global transformation of nature wrought by industrial capitalism dominates both the physical and intellectual consumption of nature’.  

It seems that, with the emergence of industrial capitalism, all older conceptions of nature became obsolete. For instance, the spatial organisation of life in capitalist cities is quite different from in feudal towns. In a city or town created when religious power was dominant, churches and chapels would have been focal points, whereas, in the age of industrial capitalism, hedge funds companies’ luxury buildings and financial institutions with high-tech glass towers rising into the sky and looking down on the city are central. In this context, nature presents itself as the raw material for the construction of daily life; in the realm of exchange value rather than use value. As a result of the emphasis on exchange value, nature becomes an external object used in the labour of human beings for the production of commodities, i.e., material production. Therefore, it is appropriate now to discuss production since it is the basic foundation of the interaction of human beings with nature.

As Marx asserts:

*Production in general* is an abstraction, but a sensible abstraction in so far as it actually emphasises and defines the common aspects and thus avoids repetition. Yet this general concept, or the common aspect which has been brought to light by comparison, is itself a multifarious compound comprising divergent categories. Some elements are found in all epochs, others are common to a few epochs. The most modern period and the most ancient period will have (certain) categories in common. Production without them is inconceivable. But although the most highly developed languages have laws and categories in common with the most primitive languages, it is precisely their divergence from these general and common features which constitutes their development. It is necessary to distinguish those definitions which apply to production in general, in order not to overlook the essential differences existing despite the unity that follows from the very fact that the subject, mankind, and the object, nature, are the same. For instance, on failure to perceive this fact depends the entire wisdom of modern economists who prove the eternity and harmony of existing social relations. For example, no  

254 Neil Smith, p. 10.
production is possible without an instrument of production, even if this instrument is simply the hand.  

I understand from the passage quoted above that there are some aspects of production that are common and characteristic of the production process in general. For instance, an artisanal mode of production is based on market exchange, as the individual is producing for contribution to the community as a whole. But under capitalism’s emphasis on exchange value in the production process, another dimension comes into play. Therefore, production in itself is not a unique characteristic of capitalism. Smith elaborates on this further:

> With production for exchange, the relation with nature is no longer exclusively a use-value relation; use-values are not produced for direct use but for exchange. As specific use-values are exchanged against each other in specific quantities, they become socially transformed into commodities, existing simultaneously as exchange-values as well as use-values. The exchange-value of a commodity expresses the quantitative relation in which it can be exchanged for other commodities; with production for exchange, exchange-value not use-value is the immediate reason for production.  

Concerning nature, it seems that its use-value is considered within its exchange value for its owner to accumulate a higher surplus value. Therefore, land, the built environment, transportation, means of communication and many other forms become commodities with exchange value. This economic relationship is unique to capitalism, and under capital accumulation and production, a very different set of relationships with nature is seen.

As Neil Smith observes:

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Under dictate from the accumulation process, capitalism as a mode of production must expand continuously if it is to survive. The reproduction of material life is wholly dependent on the production and reproduction of surplus value. To this end, capital stalks the earth in search of material resources; nature becomes a universal means of production in the sense that it not only provides the subject, objects, and instrument production, but is also in its totality an appendage to the production process.  

My interpretation of the passage above is that to view nature as a universal means of production under capitalism knows neither West nor East. Historically, cultural conditions particular to specific geographical locations would be integrated into the logic of the accumulation of exchange and surplus value. This is a search of a vampire for raw material, destroying all other modes of production, reducing all aspects of life into a world of commodities for consumption and consumption only. Moreover, the project of modernity, i.e., capitalism’s approach to nature, is to view it as totally external and alien to society. As mentioned earlier, nature becomes an object that ought to be mastered via rational scientific methods and technological development.

To summarise, I would like to say that I intended to lay the foundation for exploring the concept of nature at the most basic level. The objective of this section has been to unravel how different philosophical lenses viewed nature, and to show how we, as human beings, have manifested our relationship with nature through human activity in different eras. To an extent, I suspect that the problems of urban form and housing architecture are tied together by how nature and space are thought of under global capitalism. ‘With the development of capitalism, human society has put itself at the centre of nature’, I believe that it is only possible to address the problems with and effects of global capitalism on cities by investigating the concept of nature and space under particular ideologies.

For instance, I argue that, in the context of the suburban area of Pardis Phase 11, nature and space have been seen as commodities. Nature and land have been turned into urban space that organises life into a world of commodities for consumption. It is not difficult to see that nature and the production of the built environment in Pardis Phase 11 is based solely on exchange value; the use value

257 Neil Smith, p. 71.

258 See Diagram no. 1.

259 Neil Smith, p. 8.
and social well-being of inhabitants have been ignored for the sake of surplus value. This makes it an isolated living environment that is devoid of any reference to its historical past, cultural identity and local values. The sensory experience of Pardis Phase 11 does not arouse neighbourhood or community feeling.

It will now be helpful to proceed from a discussion of nature to one of urban space and design to better understand the impact of industrial capitalism on the lives of cities.

Diagram no. 2, designed by Ali Mousavi.
Any thinker who has an idea of an objective spatial world ... must be able to think of his perception of the world as simultaneously due to his position in the world, and to the connection of the world at that position. The very idea of the perceivable, objective, spatial world brings with it the idea of the subject as being in the world with the course of his perception due to his changing position in the world and the more-or-less stable way the world is. 

In this chapter, I will explore concepts of space and place. This involves looking closely at different notions of space, with particular interest in the urban space in relation to place. The analysis of various notions of space provides a basis for further clarification of the concept of place, as this research-orienting enquiry is towards a multi-sensory experience of urban space and place. Furthermore, it seems a natural progression to move from a discussion of nature to talking about space. As Whitehead avers, ‘it is hardly more than a pardonable exaggeration to say that the determination of the meaning of nature reduces itself principally to the discussion of the character of time and the character of space’. Space is a crucial aspect of our lives; it represents an important aspect of human existence. It is the elemental basis of architecture and a precondition for our exploration of the world. Our entire lives are embedded in space and, as humans, we are constantly affected and shaped by it. The encounter with space can be consciously observed or unconsciously experienced. As Relph notes:

The space we experience of sky or sea or landscape, or of a city spread out beneath us when viewed from a tall building, the built space of the street, of buildings viewed from the outside or experienced from the inside, the reasoned space of maps, plans, cosmographies, and geometries, interstellar space, the space possessed by objects or claimed by countries or devoted to the gods—this is the range of our experiences and understanding of space.

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Human beings live in the context of space and, therefore, it can be defined as individual space, or in social, geographical, historical–temporal, cultural or political terms. Indeed, the subject of space offers itself to a host of interpretations, none of which obviates the need for the others. These descriptions have been the subject of discussions in philosophy, science and many other fields, mostly in an abstract and philosophical way.\textsuperscript{264}

This chapter will survey some of these historical descriptions and the philosophical struggles to comprehend the debates on the concept of space. This, I believe, will help position this research on the path to finding the meaning of space in an everyday experiential context. According to Madanipour, ‘the search for a meaning of space is a necessary step to take as it is crucial that before moving into the normative realm of design, place and social space [italics mine], we explore the realm of the descriptive and analytical.\textsuperscript{265} I will outline a brief review of some of the debates and discussions on the concept of space in philosophy, mathematics and physics, which will offer a better understanding of the different dimensions of space. This approach to defining space offers a descriptive dimension; in other words, it sees space as a thing in itself, ‘to state the precise nature of space’.\textsuperscript{266} It can be categorised as ‘mental space, including logical in mathematics and physics [italics mine] and formal abstraction in philosophy [italics mine again]’.\textsuperscript{267} It has to be mentioned that ‘lived’ everyday experience of space is of main importance in this research; abstract philosophical models and theories are not the concern here. However, it is crucial to understand that there is a ‘relationship between space and place, and

\textsuperscript{264} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{265} Ali Madanipour, \emph{Design of Urban Space}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{266} Ibid, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{267} Lefebvre, \emph{The Production of Space}, p. 11.
thus to avoid the separation of places from their conceptual and experiential context'.

For instance, debates on how mental space is viewed can influence other aspects of space such as physical and social. Debates concerning space in philosophy and physics can also be found in the fields of geography, architecture and planning. Here I am exploring the idea of space by considering place experiences, the enclosure of space and how experience determines how space is viewed. Therefore, the concept of space is parallel to that of place. As Relph adds, 'however we feel or know or explain space, there is nearly always some associated sense or concept of place. In general, it seems that space provides the context for places but derives its meaning from particular places'.

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268 Relph, p. 8.

269 Madanipour, Design of Urban Space.

270 Relph, p. 8.
Mental Space: Logical and Abstract

Men fancy places, traces, and spaces, though these things consist only in the truth of relations and not at all in any absolute reality.271

Concepts such as nature, space and time have occupied many natural philosophers since ancient times. Their philosophical contemplation of these concepts resulted in conflicting views. The concept of nature was discussed previously in this research. Additionally, it is important to recognise that conflicting views of nature and space were held over the last three centuries by rationalist thinkers (e.g., Isaac Newton), who saw nature and space as absolute and divine.272 Empiricist or sceptical thinkers (e.g., Leibniz) saw nature and space as mechanical objects.273 These philosophical debates about space have been dominated by the two schools of thought mentioned above, which created absolute versus relational theories of space. Newton developed the theory of absolute space, in which ‘space is distinct from the body and ... time passes uniformly without regard to whether anything happens in the world’.274 It is evident that Newton’s definition of space is independent of bodies, so abstract space is a thing in itself. In order to establish this view of space as an independent entity, Newton came up with another theory corresponding to the theory of absolute space, which he called relative space. As Newton himself makes clear, as cited by Jammer:

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271 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, ‘Fifth Paper in Reply to Clarke’, in Correspondence by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Samuel Clarke, ed. by Roger Ariew (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2000).

272 Madanipour, Design of Urban Space.


I do not define time, space, place, and motion as being well known to all. Only I must observe that the common people conceive those quantities under no other notions but from the relation, they bear to sensible objects. And hence arise certain prejudices, for the removal of which it will be convenient to distinguish them into absolute and relative, true and apparent, mathematical and common... absolute space in its own nature, without relation to anything external, remains always similar and immovable. Relative space is some movable dimension or measure of the absolute spaces; which our senses determine by its position to bodies.\textsuperscript{275}

In my view, the above passage shows Newton’s preference of the absolute notion of space. For him, the notion of space, time and place is not something that is known to all people. For Newton, true understanding of space is through mathematics and has to be conceived without any external relation. The major opposition that developed as a critique of the Newtonian absolute theory of space was that of Leibniz, with his theory of relational space. Leibniz had a very different way of thinking to Newton’s; Leibniz wrote that space is ‘something merely relative, as time is, ... an order of coexistence, as time is an order of successions.\textsuperscript{276} What this means is that space is something that is in relation to other things, and space cannot exist in the absence of relationships between objects. Leibniz, in his famous correspondence with Samuel Clarke (in the third letter), replies:

As for my own opinion, I have said more than once that I hold space to be something purely relative, as time is-that I hold it to be an order of coexistences, as time is an order of successions. For space denotes, in terms of possibility, an order of things that exist at the same time, considered as existing together, without entering into their particular manners of existing. And when many things are seen together, one consciously perceives this order of things among themselves. \textsuperscript{277}

The two passages quoted above from Newton and Leibniz show the opposition of the relationist theory of space to the Newtonian concept of absolute space. There


\textsuperscript{276} Huggett and Hoefer.

\textsuperscript{277} Leibniz and Clarke, p. 14.
was another major opposition to Newtonian and Leibnizian concepts of space from Immanuel Kant, first in a short essay, ‘On the Differentiation of Direction in Space’, in 1768. However, in this essay Kant did not develop his own theory of space or how absolute space can be known. It was not until his monumental work *Critique of Pure Reason* that he presented a theory of space. For Kant, the only possible way to talk about space is from within the realm of human experience. As Guyer and Wood observe:

Kant argues that space and time are both the *pure forms* of all intuitions, or “*formal principle[s] of the sensible world*”, and themselves *pure intuitions*: they are the forms in which particular objects are presented to us by the senses, but also themselves unique particulars of which we can have *a priori* knowledge, the basis of our *a priori* knowledge of both mathematics and physics.\(^{278}\)

What Kant is saying here, according to my interpretation, is that the possibility of space and time meaning anything to human beings does not exist, unless we have the capacity of sense perception. Therefore, it is our receptive ability that makes it possible for us to comprehend objects outside us. Moreover, Kant asserts that:

We can accordingly speak of space, extended beings, and so on, only from the human standpoint. If we depart from the subjective condition under which alone, we can acquire outer intuition, namely that through which we may be affected by objects, then the representation of space signifies nothing at all. This predicate is attributed to things only insofar as they appear to us, i.e., are objects of sensibility.\(^{279}\)

This view of space leaves aside the conceptual and abstract discussion of mathematics and the physical conception of space. It established another process and relationships that were not only determined by the laws of physics and mathematics. Additionally, it floated the possibility of understanding space

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\(^{279}\) Kant, pp. 159–60.
from the standpoint of human experience. However, it was with Albert Einstein’s the theory of relativity that the n-dimensional concept of space became dominant. As Smith remarks:

Three-dimensional space or four-dimensional space-time gave way to n-dimensional mathematical space; physical space is superseded by mathematical space. Whereas the concept of physical space always retained some reference to practical human experience, mathematical space is a complete abstraction beyond this.  

Einstein’s relativity theory, like relational theories of space, also rejects the Newtonian concept of absolute space. Einstein sees absolute space as ‘space as a container of all material objects’ and the relational theory of space as ‘space as the positional quality of the world of material objects’. The former theory, which is Newton’s (absolute space), for Einstein is abstract and ‘free from any connection with material objects. In this way, one can arrive at the concept of space which is unlimited in extent and contains all material objects. The latter theory (relational space), Einstein observes, relates to the concept of place: ‘place is, first of all, a (small) portion of the earth’s surface identified by a name. The thing whose “place” is being specified is a “material object” or body’. However, as mentioned earlier, Newton also theorised a conception of relative space, but it was secondary to his theory of absolute space. It was with Einstein’s relativity theory that relative space became primary, as Neil Smith also explains:

Einstein’s relativity theory seemed to reinstate the priority of relative space, seeing absolute space as only a special case of relative space, nonetheless, the relative space of twentieth-century physics is markedly different from pre-Newtonian relativity of space.

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282 Jammer, p. xiv.
283 Jammer, p. xiii.
284 Neil Smith, p. 95.
Perhaps what can be concluded from the theories and philosophies discussed above, is that the Kantian philosophy of space as well as theories of relativity and relationist theories of space were opposed to Newtonian absolute space. For Kant, the human subjective condition is the necessary prerequisite for experiencing space. Therefore, space has no meaning and cannot exist in and of itself, without human perception. Additionally, the investigation and understanding of space and place ought to be focused on those who are users of space and are in it. It is this emphasis on the human sense perception of space and place that is being examined in this research.

The history of the concept of space, particularly three-dimensional and four-dimensional, has been mostly abstract mathematical and scientific. However, scientific discussions of space had a huge influence on our understanding of social space. Yet the treatment of the concept of social space is determined by social relationships within society and is addressing quite different issues from the scientific concept of space. However, in this multi-sensorial research the focus is on the treatment of space and place as a commodity in relation to urban form and housing architecture. At this point, I will turn to my main concern regarding space: geographical, architectural space. Different theories of space, whether absolute or relational, can also be found in the fields of geography and urban studies. But the primary concern of this thesis is to show how a particular view of space, i.e., the Western method of rational planning, has been considered as a universal standard.
I don’t live in the infinite because in the infinite one is not at home.\textsuperscript{285}

I would like to use the quote above to open up the discussion around the different views of space in the context of urban space and geography. Like Bachelard, I also think infinity is not a place or somewhere that one can dwell. Infinity is something that is endless, and it is unknown; one cannot be situated in infinity. From my understanding, what Bachelard is referring to here by mentioning infinity is the concept of absolute space, as infinity itself is absolute and one cannot make any relation in infinity. According to Madanipour, in the field of geography, ‘there is a tendency to use the term relative space for what philosophy calls relational space, perhaps due to the influence of the theory of relativity’.\textsuperscript{286}

This relative space in geography refers to ‘merely a relation between events or an aspect of events, and thus bound to time and process’.\textsuperscript{287} Absolute space has been defined as ‘clearly distinct, real, and objective space’; absolute space or ‘contextual space’ is ‘a dimension which focuses on the characteristics of things in terms of their concentration and dispersion’.\textsuperscript{288} It is clear that a different understanding of the concept of space, and the primacy of these two concepts, is also present amongst geographers. Perhaps subscribing to either school of thought is a matter of how one understands the world. However, for the purposes of this research, the main focus will be on the concepts of space and place in relation to urban form and architecture.

Bernard Tschumi, in his book \textit{Questions of Space}, talks about two different approaches to defining space: the first is ‘to make space distinct’ and the second approach is ‘to state the precise nature of space’. The former view has been related to space in art and architecture, and the latter is the domain of philosophy,

\textsuperscript{285} Gaston Bachelard, \textit{The Poetics of Space}, new edn (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

\textsuperscript{286} Madanipour, \textit{Design of Urban Space}, p. 6.


\textsuperscript{288} Madanipour, \textit{Design of Urban Space}, p. 6.
mathematics and physics.\textsuperscript{289} It is, of course, space in relation to place and architecture that is the concern here. In this regard, it can be said that space is the primary aspect of architecture and, as Zevi observes, space is the core of architecture. The facades and walls of a house, church or palace, no matter how beautiful they may be, are only the container, the box formed by walls; the content is the internal space.\textsuperscript{290} In this concept, the emphasis is on the internal space of a house and how it has been designed. After all, it is the home that we all go back to for comfort and dwelling. For Hans van der Laan, architectural space is an addition to external/natural space, as it resolves the conflict between our experience of space.\textsuperscript{291} What van der Laan is suggesting here is that architectural space comes into actuality by materialising human activity into built form. Therefore, we experience two kinds of space: an internal space, which is taking place within the buildings, and an external space, which is the space between buildings and other built objects.

As Zevi asserts:

\begin{quote}
Since every architectural volume, every structure of walls, constitute a boundary, a pause in the continuity of space, it is clear that every building functions in the creation of two kinds of space: its internal space; completely defined by the building itself, and it external or urban space, defined by that building and the others around it.\textsuperscript{292}
\end{quote}

It seems that the concept of internal and external space as the essence of architecture is quite strong, and the relationship between these two is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{291} Hans van der Laan, \textit{Architectonic Space: Fifteen Lessons on the Disposition of the Human Habitat} (Leiden: BRILL, 1983), p. 11.
\item \textsuperscript{292} Zevi and Barry, p. 30.
\end{itemize}
interdependent. After all, the interpretation of either of these spaces is dependent on our sensory impressions and how we experience them. These internal and external spaces can both be seen as urban space. Yet again, urban space can be defined in two ways: as social space and built space. The former is ‘the spatial implications of social institutions’ and the latter is focusing on the physical aspect of space—‘its morphology, the way it affects our perceptions, the way it is used, and the meaning it can elicit’. To examine the issue in this research in a more adequate fashion, I consider the concept of space in relation to those who are the users of it.

It appears that the distinctions and dilemmas of space lie really in the interests of the people who are involved in the process of housing architecture and urban design. One thing that seems clear in the discussion of space is the traditional duality that was also present in the discourse of nature. The most prominent figure who aimed to bridge this gap in the field of architecture and urban design was Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre introduced a dialectical relationship to the debates around space and arrived at a unitary theory of space.

Diagram No. 3, designed by Ali Mousavi.

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Lefebvre’s concern with space is mainly about social space— in other words, ‘logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of imagination such as projects and projections’. He sees this social space as a social product, and, more so in this view, space is a product of thought and action. Such a view of space places the focus on an acting subject; what is at issue here is the possibility of agency having a relationship with the space that is being produced. In this regard, agency is the capacity for thought and action; thus, in the process of producing space, agents are also producing agency itself. Moreover, ‘it is because of the way space is necessarily implicated in agency that agency becomes an important route for investigation of space- and so also of place’. In other words, thought and action, what is felt and thought, are similarly bound together.

As mentioned earlier, for Kant the human subjective condition was a necessary requirement for experiencing space, i.e., human subjectivity. There is a correlation between Kant’s subjective space and Lefebvre’s social space, as they both place the emphasis on the agent’s relation to space and place. Moreover, what can be taken from both is that, to fully grasp the concept of space and place, an agent’s sensory and cognitive capacity as well as their interaction with their environment is required. Furthermore, for Lefebvre, ‘space is a means of production and it is also a means of control, and hence domination, of power; yet that, as such, escapes in part from those who would make use of it.’ Furthermore, he argues that every society and mode of production produces its own particular space and place. The concept of the mode of production, along with its specific means, plays an important role in Lefebvre’s analysis of space as a social and political product. To view space as a product would mean that its production is determined by the way society is organised. Or in other words, the organisation of environment and city life, town planning, housing architecture, urban form and design are all dependent on the ideology and reproduction of

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294 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 12.


the socioeconomic formation that every society is implementing. From this perspective, in the context of the anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism slogans of the 1979 Iranian revolution, the expectation would be that space, i.e., urban form and housing architecture, will be distinct from cities under the capitalist mode of production of space and life.

Lefebvre further argues that, under the capitalist mode of production, space becomes a commodity, which can be bought and sold in the market. As he explicates:

Capitalism and neo-capitalism have produced abstract space, which includes the ‘world of commodities’, its ‘logic’ and its worldwide strategies, as well as the power of money and that of political state. This space is founded on the vast network of banks, business centres and major productive entities, as also on motorways, airports and information lattices. Within this space the town- once the forcing house of accumulation, fountainhead of wealth and centre of historical space – has disintegrated.\textsuperscript{297}

The implication of treating space, the built environment and cities according to capitalism is, therefore, focusing on the maximum exchange value and the accumulation of net profit. Moreover, it results in the destruction of the existing fabric and landscape of the city to open up room for accumulation. For instance, constructing large shopping malls requires a huge amount of space and land. The mall itself, car parks, patterns of social behaviour and the public transport network are among the many transformations that must take place to make the shopping mall a sustainable business. Interest in commercial plans or organising space in this manner will have an effect on the urban form and design of communities.

For example, in modernist architecture and planning, the physical characteristics of the built environment and form are architects’ primary concern.\textsuperscript{298} As the well-known phrase also indicates, ‘form follows function’ is the vital philosophy of a building. In this viewpoint, physical space or form is seen as independent of social space or function. As a result, the relationship between physical space and social space, i.e., between form and function, becomes deterministic and linear.\textsuperscript{299} This

\textsuperscript{297} Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 53.

\textsuperscript{298} Madanipour, *Design of Urban Space*.

\textsuperscript{299} Ibid, pp. 10–11.
separation between different aspects of space can be seen as characteristic of modernist planning and architecture, involving the continuity of using typologies, separation of form from content, rejection of historical development and cultural context.\textsuperscript{300} Therefore, focusing on only one of these aspects and ignoring the others would mean that the analysis of the social processes involved in the making of space and place is not complete. To resolve the conflict between different aspects of space, Lefebvre’s unitary theory of space offers the concept of social space and spatial practice. By analysing space in this unitary way, it becomes apparent that, through a combination of different aspects of the space of the city, of buildings and people, there will be a balance to viewing urban space. Moreover, each society and country will have a different physical, social and mental conception of space and organising life. For instance, geographical conditions, the topography of the land and geological varieties will determine the urban form and design of a particular city and town. As Lefebvre reminds us:

\begin{quote}
If indeed every society produces a space, its own space, this will have other consequences in addition to those we have already considered. Any ‘social existence’ aspiring or claiming to be ‘real’, but failing to produce its own space, would be a strange entity, a very peculiar kind of abstraction unable to escape from ideological or even ‘cultural’ realm.\textsuperscript{301}
\end{quote}

What this is suggesting is the possibility of having a criterion for distinguishing between different ideologies and practices as well as different conceptions of housing architecture, urban space and design. Although they are under the forces of global capitalism and the domination of one particular conception of space, most cities and housing architecture styles follow the same pattern of urban planning. As the case study of this research is in the city of Tehran, I intend to find out that how global forces, a lack of clear vision of city planning aligned with traditional planning, and the failures of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development in the Iranian post-revolution era to produce a new concept of urban planning have had an effect on urban form in Tehran.


\textsuperscript{301} Lefebvre, \textit{The Production of Space}, p. 53.
As Lefebvre observes:

A revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed, it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses. A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space—though its impact need not occur at the same rate, or with equal force, in each of these areas.302

In my understanding, what the passage above suggests is that space plays an essential role in transforming and improving everyday life. It emphasises that change is required at all levels and in all spheres of society for a new social order to emerge. Moreover, this might also indicate that new social relationships and forms of life need new space, and vice versa. In Production of Space, Lefebvre looks at different historical epochs and argues that each society should produce its own particular space according to its historical, cultural and economic situation and mode of production. This allows for the possibility of having a set of criteria to distinguish between ideology and practices of placemaking. Or ‘for distinguishing between the lived space [my italics throughout] on the one hand and the perceived space and the conceived space on the other’.303 For example, he looks at three different modes of production of space: a) European mediaeval society, b) capitalism and neocapitalism and c) state socialism. Lefebvre takes as an example socialism and revolution in Soviet Russia and its aftermath between 1920 and 1930, and questions state socialism and the Russian revolution in the context of its production of space. Lefebvre raises the question: is it possible to find a socialist architectural production that would be distinguishable when contrasted with the capitalist production of architecture?304

It is within this context that, I too raise a question: how can post-revolutionary architecture and urbanism policies in Iran, in the context of their anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism slogans, be conceived? The fundamental ideas of the Islamic revolution were based on anti-imperialism and anti-Westernisation, in a reaction to Pahlavi’s regime, for envisaging a modern, secular society aligned

302 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, p. 54.
303 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, p. 53.
304 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, p. 54.
with Western values. When the ideas of Western modernisation were introduced in Iran, ‘there emerged simultaneously a reactionary anti-modern, anti-Western approach. This approach rejected or radically criticised the importance and application of any modern concept in any field’.305

Anti-Westernisation became a buzzword to the extent that Jalal Al-e Ahmad, a teacher and literary figure, coined the term ‘westoxification’ (gharbzadegi) in the 1940s. He saw ‘Westoxification’ as an ‘epidemic disease, like cholera, a disease that has come from outside and found a hospitable environment to spread’.306 ‘The city and urbanity were interpreted as negative concepts by contrast with a romanticised primitive village life’.307 This was a confrontation between becoming Westernised/modern and the traditional Iranian, Islamic way of life. As discussed earlier in the chapter of nature, the former way of organising life had been based on a total break with traditional values, instrumental rationality and scientific methods. In the latter way of life, the spiritual and material worlds were regarded as inseparable. The emphasis had been on the unity (tawhid) between the two, which was to be found in all spheres of life. On the one hand, all aspects of Iranian life were seen in comparison with the Western style; ‘European styled educational institutions, Westernised women active outside the home, and modern economic structures with state factories and to rebuild Iran in the image of the West’.308 And on the other hand, the traditionalist and anti-Western opposition was led by the clergy and Bazarist, who preferred the pre-modern Islamic way of life. ‘In their encounter with the modern world, they resort to the Islamic past, and in this return recognize the Holy Scripture, the Quran, without the medium of any new interpretation, as their sole foundation of faith’.309

305 Shirazi, p. 165.


307 Shirazi, p. 166.

308 Abrahamian, Iran between Two Revolutions, p. 140.

309 Behnam, p. 10.
However, in the context of architecture and the production of urban space, it seems that the implementation of past Islamic architecture and urban design policies remained exclusively under the influence of Western style. ‘Modern Tehran is the result of a collision of Eastern and Western cultures that occurred a century ago and, as such, a city of fragments and contrast’.\textsuperscript{310} It is within this context that this research raises the following question: what kind of architectural production and urban planning can be found in the post-revolution era of the Islamic Republic of Iran? Examples in the case study indicate how contemporary urban planning, the production of space and housing architecture in Iran have been influenced by Western concepts of urban planning.

In this chapter, I have searched for the meaning of nature and space, arguing that to understand the city and our built form, there should be an attempt to integrate and understand three aspects of the space of the city: physical, social and mental. Our cities and built environment should be regarded as related objects, as urban space is a combination of people and material objects. As Madanipour observes, ‘there should be a constant negotiation with our social and physical environment in our everyday experiences’.\textsuperscript{311} However, as mentioned earlier, space is socially produced, and these three aspects of the space of the city are component parts of a more comprehensive entity.


\textsuperscript{311} Madanipour, \textit{Design of Urban Space}, p. 29.
Urban Form and Architecture: A Historical Background

This chapter consists of two sections; in the first part, I will be looking at the origin of early cities, particularly the Sumerian civilisation of the Tigris/Euphrates in Southern Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq), with the extension through the Arabian Peninsula. In addition, there will be descriptions of urban settlements, and the evolution and history of their urban form. Furthermore, I will be investigating the determinant factors that influenced the shape and structure of the cities established in these early urban civilisations (Bronze Age: 3500–3000 BCE).\(^{312}\) And in the second part, I will be looking at the concept of the Islamic city via the assumptions and descriptions that have been made by scholars such as Marcais (1928), Sauvaget (1934), von Grunebaum (1955) and Planhol (1959).

I further argue that it has been a common mistake to give all cities in Muslim countries the title of ‘Islamic city’. Many countries in West Asia, including Iran, have been studied only and primarily from religious perspectives, ignoring other important factors such as the physical environment and cultural and political factors. In addition, this chapter highlights the stereotypical concept of the ‘Islamic city’ introduced by Western scholars including Planhol and Marcais.\(^{313}\) Then, in response, I search for a clearer picture of the so-called ‘Islamic city’. Moreover, in this chapter, I intend to look for various explanations to arrive at a better understanding of the formation and development of traditional Iranian cities.

For this purpose, it is crucial to return to the historical evolution of the early urban civilisations in Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) and the formation of their cities. Ur has been chosen as an example of a Sumerian city. Additionally, I lay a historical foundation for understanding the reasons for cities’ shape and the


factors that influenced early human beings' settlements and living environments. Perhaps most important of all will be to find the roots of Islamic architecture and urban culture in the context of a traditional Iranian city that has been known as an 'Islamic city' or 'Muslim city'. As Besim S. Hakim, in his book Arabic-Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles contends, 'the urban form and organisational system prevalent in most traditional cities within the Islamic world originated in pre-Islamic models, in particular, the Mesopotamian model'.

The discussion of Islamic cities and architecture makes reference to the context of West Asian cities, in particular in Iran, as they share a considerable number of similarities in terms of physical and urban form.

The Early Cities

The first urban civilisations had been through an evolutionary process. The ‘so-called urban revolution flared independently in several places on earth at different times’. The urban historian A.E.J. Morris, in his book History of Urban Form: Before the Industrial Revolutions, states that these phases are as follows:

The first of these phases covers the whole of the Palaeolithic Age, from its origin, at least half a million years ago, until around 10000 BC, followed by the proto-Neolithic and Neolithic Ages. These in turn led to the fourth phase, the bronze Age, starting between 3500 and 3000 BC and lasting for some 2000 years. During this last period the first urban civilisations were firmly established.

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316 Morris.
From the passage above, it becomes clear that Morris considers the evolution of urban processes to be in three phases. Each of these phases involved a radical transformation in the way of organising life and society. The first urban civilisations were established in the Bronze Age. Other examples of proto-urban settlements have been found with characteristics of Neolithic settlements in Western Asia, such as Jericho, Ain Ghazal, Catal Huyuk and Khirokitia.\(^317\) For instance, Catal Huyuk was a large Neolithic settlement in southern Anatolia in Turkey. ‘With perhaps 10,000 souls, disposed of valued commodity, obsidian, the black volcanic glass that was the best material of the time for cutting tools, so it had the wherewithal for foreign trade’.\(^318\)

In the book *The First Civilisations: The Archaeology of their Origin*, Dr Glyn Daniel identifies seven locations where these early civilisations were located: Southern Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus Valley (present-day India and Pakistan), the Yellow River area in China, the Valley of Mexico, the jungles of Guatemala and Honduras, the coastlands and highlands of Peru.\(^319\) These seven civilisations existed at different times. After the disappearance of a few of them (Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley), new civilisations such as Greek, Roman and Western European evolved. The Mesopotamian civilisation also played a crucial role in the evolution of urban communities in the Arabian Peninsula.\(^320\) It should be noted here that the domestication of animals, cultivation of food and environmental changes made possible the development and flourishing of these communities.\(^321\) Without favourable changes in their surroundings, it would have been almost impossible for any of these civilisations to create permanent urban settlements.

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\(^317\) Kostof.

\(^318\) Ibid.


\(^320\) Morris.

\(^321\) Ibid.
As Mumford reminds us:

In such an environment human society could successfully adopt an aggressive attitude to surrounding nature and proceed to the active exploitation of the organic world. Stock breeding and the cultivation of plants were the first revolutionary step in man’s emancipation from dependence on the external environment.\(^\text{322}\)

What Mumford is suggesting here is that, with the increased skill of civilisations in terms of agriculture and animal husbandry, especially in the form of surplus food production, the transformation of villages into cities became possible. This production and transformation through human labour was discussed earlier in this thesis in relation to Marx’s general concept of production and the common categories of production, regardless of different epoch and historical time. Although this development was slow, it involved elements of intervention by humans and ecological diffusion. However, the transformation from Neolithic villages into cities happened between 3500 and 3000 BCE, which has been called the ‘urban revolution’.\(^\text{323}\) As alluded to above, there were requirements for the transition from a Neolithic society into an urban one. As Mumford explains:

As far as the present record stands, grain cultivation, the plough, the potter’s wheel, the sailboat, the draw-loom, metallurgy, abstract mathematics, exact astronomical observations, the calendar, writing and other modes of intelligible discourse in permanent form, all came into existence around 3000 BC, give or take a few centuries.\(^\text{324}\)

All these processes flourished in the Tigris/Euphrates region around 4000 and 3000 BCE. Village communities in the Tigris/Euphrates region changed considerably in terms of size as well as structure.\(^\text{325}\) As a result of these changes, from 3000 BCE onwards, there was a structural shift from village economy and community life. Surplus production made it possible for some people to break

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\(^{323}\) Morris, .

\(^{324}\) Mumford, *The City in History*.

\(^{325}\) Morris, p. 5.
away from their dependency on the land and acquire new skills and tasks.\footnote{Kostof.} This created the possibility of more complex bureaucratic administrations, such as the Sumerian city-states, with their tens of thousands of people, rich religions, political organisation, military and advanced technology.\footnote{Morris, pp. 5–6.} By the time the ruler of the Akkadian empire, Sargon, made the city of Agade (near Babylon) the capital of the Sumerian state (2750 BCE), there were effectively multiple autonomous cities including Eridu, Ur, Lagash, Larsa, Kish, Jemdet Nasr and Uruk.\footnote{Morris, pp. 6–7.}

Amongst these cities, perhaps the most prominent one was Ur, as it became the capital of the Sumerian Dynasty. There have been significant archaeological findings there (Figure 1). This ancient city in Mesopotamia is now located in southern Iraq. Besides the importance of Ur as one of the earliest cities of civilisation, being built on a mound, my concern here is with its urban form. Before describing the urban form of Ur, it is important to explain the formation of tells, the foundations of cities such as Ur. As Morris describes, ‘the word tell is of pre-Islamic origin and refers to those clearly defined man-made settlements mounds which are such an archaeological feature of Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Turkey, southern Russia and a few places in Europe’\footnote{Morris, pp. 6–7.} such as Xeropolis on the island of Euboea in Greece [italics mine].\footnote{Morris, pp. 6–7.} A tell or mound is usually a man-made hill, formed from the accumulation of ruins of buildings on the same location that generation after generation of people has been rebuilding on for thousands of years (Figure 2).
In Mesopotamia, and other locations mentioned above, the main material used for making most houses and buildings was sun-dried mud bricks. The lifespan of such materials was probably limited to 75 years, by which time the climate
conditions brought about deterioration and collapse. Then, the remaining debris was used to make a foundation for a new building; thereby, the ground level gradually rises over time and creates a *tell* or mound. Therefore, the making of the urban form of Ur was a long evolutionary process and the city was divided into three parts. Morris describes the city as follows:

> There are three basics parts of the third Dynasty Ur: the old walled city, the temenos or religious precinct, and the outer town. The walled city was an irregular oval shape, about three-quarters of a mile long by half a mile wide. It stood on the mound formed by the ruins of preceding buildings with the Euphrates flowing along the western side and a wide navigable canal to the north and east. Two harbours to the north and west provided protected anchorages and it is possible that a minor canal ran through the city area.

Looking at the general layout plan of Ur during the period 2100–1900 BCE, the description above becomes clearer (Figure 3). The religious section was located in the northwest quarter of the city and occupied a considerable amount of space. The rest of the area within the walled city consisted of a residential area in the old part of the city. According to the British archaeologist Sir Leonard Wooley, the ‘residential area at Ur had been built on a large scale for hundreds of years, and as those houses and mud huts fell into decay the new ones were built on the ruins, consequently the ground level rose higher and higher over time’. What this implies is that the form and layout of the city had grown organically, whereby an unplanned evolutionary urban process evolved. As Wooley emphasises, ‘the houses are grouped together in layouts that had grown out of the conditions of the primitive village and are not laid out on any system

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330 Morris.

331 Morris, p. 7.

of town planning. What Wooley refers to here is layout planning or ‘organic growth’ rather than a ‘planned’ urban form.

‘Organic growth’ is a kind of urban form that has been developed as a result of years and years of historical inhabitation of a settlement. This kind of planning is also known as ‘chance growth’ and the ‘spontaneous city’, meaning that their development was not subject to any designer nor a masterplan. It is worth emphasising that ‘organic growth’ does not convey a totally unplanned and unintentional accretion process. As Kostof, in his book *The City Shaped: Urban Patterns and Meanings through History* (1991), remarks:

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333 Ibid.

334 Kostof.
The fact is that no city, however arbitrary its form may appear to us, can be said to be “unplanned”. Beneath the strangest twist of lane or alley, behind the most fitfully bounded public place, lies an order beholden to prior occupation, to the features of the land, to long established conventions of the social contact, to a string of compromises between individual rights and common will.\(^{335}\)

What Kostof is suggesting above might be that, whatever the form, shape and actual practices of planning, ancient traditions and city-making were intentional acts. Similarly, in contrast to ‘organic growth’ is the ‘planned’ urban form, which is the result of a predetermined intention of the design\(^{336}\) (Figures 4 and 5). The pattern in this model is determined, and geometrical diagrams are crucial factors. ‘At its purest it would be a grid, or else a centrally planned scheme like a circle or a polygon with radial streets issuing from the centre; but often the geometry is more complex, marrying the two pure formulas in modulated and refracted combinations’.\(^{337}\) It is a characteristic of the history of urban form that the new planned extension was diluted and mixed with organic-growth settlements in many cities.

The coexistence of these two primary urban forms, i.e., organic and planned, presents an interesting dichotomy. Kostof suggests that the ‘Two primary urban arrangements, the planned and the “organic”, often exist side by side, as does tidy Back Bay next to old Boston. Tidy Back Bay is part of the city of Boston in Massachusetts, which was built on reclaimed land in the Charles River basin as a new neighbourhood next to the old and historic Boston’.\(^{338}\) As the name suggests, Back Bay was originally a bay that was exposed to the tide; as a result,\(^{338}\)

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\(^{335}\) Ibid, p. 52.

\(^{336}\) Morris, pp. 11–12.

\(^{337}\) Kostof, p. 43.

water would have risen and fallen a few times each day.\textsuperscript{339} The first transformation of Back Bay was carried out in 1814. The plan was to construct a milldam, which turned out to be an unsuccessful project. In 1857, another project was introduced to create the dam.\textsuperscript{340} The Back Bay project became known as one of the largest land reclamation endeavours at the time. It is also interesting to note that a considerable portion of the dam is buried under present-day Beacon Street in Tidy Back Bay.\textsuperscript{341} Additionally, the land reclamation and building the dam made possible the further urban planning and construction of Back Bay. Back Bay was to become a new planned urban project beside the old city of Boston.\textsuperscript{342} The planning of the new neighbourhood of Back Bay was done by the American designer and architect Arthur Gilman. The plan featured a wide, tree-lined boulevard, nothing like the old part. Gilman was highly influenced by Haussmann’s urban major renovation of Paris in 1853.\textsuperscript{343} In comparison, at the time, the city of Boston’s planning was organic, with irregular and rectilinear urban arrangements in the new neighbourhood of Back Bay. As Kostof elaborates:

\begin{quote}
Most historic towns, and virtually all those of metropolitan size, are puzzles of premeditated and spontaneous segments, variously interlocked or juxtaposed. The “organic” old core is itself likely to be a composite of several units; surrounding it will be an array of more or less orderly new quarters; along the city edge, and in unoccupied internal pockets, extemporaneous squatter settlements of recent years could effectively confound what legible consistency the urban form might have assumed in the course of its life…. It is questionable gain to divorce regular from irregular in this continuous effort of adjustment.\textsuperscript{344}
\end{quote}

Kostof is implying that the process of making cities and their evolution always entail an act of will and intention; they are places of becoming and constant


\textsuperscript{341} Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay.

\textsuperscript{342} Peterson.

\textsuperscript{343} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{344} Kostof, p. 47.
change. Urban forms are not static and finite entities; cities are never perfect and complete. Or, as Kevin Lynch in his book *Good City Form* (1981) points out, ‘cities are not organisms, any more than they are machines, and perhaps even less so. They do not grow or change themselves, or reproduce or repair themselves’. This might also indicate that, as mentioned above, it is human intention and acts of will that drive cities forward. I agree with Kostof that perhaps there is no advantage to separating regular and irregular design or organic and planned urban forms. However, I take into consideration the fact that one method of urban planning and form, i.e., the rational, geometrical Western model, should neither be imposed on other urban entities and histories nor become a standard, universalised model. For instance, Kostof also recognises that ‘Modern colonial powers overwhelmed the native tangle of North African medinas and the ancient towns of India and Indochina with grand geometric designs’. Later in this chapter, issues with the imposition of Western formal planning and principles on different urban entities and cultures will be discussed in more depth.

Furthermore, it should be emphasised that throughout the history of the form of settlements, whether a village or urban setting, many factors have been influential in shaping urban forms. For instance, Lynch categorises three models of urban form, which he called ‘normative models’. The form of a city could be viewed as one of the following. A) The *Cosmic* model, or holy city, which takes its form from interpretations of its relation to the universe and the gods. ‘Characteristic design of this model are the monumental axis, the enclosure and its protected gates, dominant landmarks and spatial organisation by hierarchy’. B) The *Practical* model or the city as machine, ‘made up of small, autonomous, undifferentiated parts, linked up into a great machine which in contrast has clearly differentiated functions and motions’. Le Corbusier’s

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346 Kostof, p. 46.

347 Lynch, *Good City Form*, pp. 73–98.

348 Ibid.
Radiant City is an example of this model. Le Corbusier was a French-Swiss architect whose plan for the Radiant City was to become one of the most influential and controversial urban design projects in Modernist architecture in Europe. The plan of the Radiant City remained Le Corbusier’s dream of utopian city planning as it was never actualized in reality. His plan was very much influenced by the concept of the Linear City, in which a city would be designed into functionally different sections.

The model of the city as a machine and urban projects such as the Radiant City have come under criticism from a new generation of New Urbanists such as Lewis Mumford and James Howard Kunstler. New Urbanism began in the early 1980s in the United States, which was promoting more environmentally conscious urban design by creating neighbourhoods that consist of a wide variety of housing and encourage walking. For these New Urbanists, the Radiant City model lacked environmentally friendly and walkable living areas. For instance, for James Howard Kunstler, the Radiant City lacked human scale and connection to surroundings, and for Mumford it was simply ‘buildings in a parking lot’.

C) The Organic model or biological city views the city ‘as a living thing rather than a machine. It has a definite boundary and an optimum size, a cohesive, indivisible internal structure, and a rhythmic behaviour that seeks, in the face of inevitable change, to maintain a balanced state’. In making this categorisation, Lynch provides the logic and influential factors that have shaped cities in each model. Therefore, it could be said that cities come in many different shapes and forms. Different factors determine how cities evolve in various parts of the world.

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351 Caves.


353 Lynch, *Good City Form*, pp. 73–98.
Figure 4. An organic urban growth, drawn by Ali Mousavi. Adapted from A. E. J. Morris, *History of Urban Form: Before the Industrial Revolutions*.

Figure 5. Planned and gridiron urban form, drawn by Ali Mousavi. Adapted from A. E. J. Morris, *History of Urban Form: Before the Industrial Revolutions*. 
'Urban form determinants' is the terminology that Morris uses to identify influential factors that influence the form of settlements in both villages and cities. He categorises them by origin. The first is *natural world determinants* of the location of a settlement, such as its climate, topography and construction materials. The second important factor is *man-made determinants*, which have had important and complex effects on the natural world at a rapid pace since the Industrial Revolution and the evolution of technologies. The term refers to humans’ intervention in the natural environment to create settlements, which continues to increase as technology evolves. As a result, man-made determinants have become the primary factor shaping today’s cities.

As Morris points out, ‘by comparison with their natural-world counterparts, the man-made determinants are considerably more numerous and have continued to increase in number as urban societies, and technologies have evolved from earlier times’. The machine model city, or the Radiant City model of planning discussed earlier, can be seen as an example of the dominance of total human intervention and rational Western urban planning. *Pardis Phase 11*, which is the case study of this research, could be seen as another example of this kind of domination. I take the view that *Pardis Phase 11* planning follows the same methods and ideas as Le Corbusier’s Radiant City, i.e., the machine city model, whereby, the primary motivating forces are a wide range of man-made determinants.

A few of the most important man-made factors that have had a major effect on urban form and have been mainly responsible are trade, politics, social power and religion. Each of these factors had a huge influence on the urban fabric of societies, and a massive role to play in urban formation and growth. Another widely acknowledged factor shaping cities is the topography in various parts of the world. For instance, going back to early cities like Ur, which was built on a flat mud plain, ‘most Mesopotamian cities were built in the flat mud plains of the Tigris and Euphrates, and one of the most standard interpretations of the ziggurat form is that it was intended, by the early inhabitants whose original...
homeland was the mountainous region of the Caspian Sea, to stimulate natural peaks'.

It seems important at this stage to broaden the examples of the role of topography in shaping other places. For example, Rio De Janeiro is another city where hills, mountains and a bay have conditioned its shape for the last 300 years of its history. Moreover, there are many other cities whose topographical characteristics influenced their shape and forms: river towns, the seaside, defensive ancient cities like Troy and Idalion and Italian hill towns could be all considered examples of man-made and natural determinants (Figure 6).

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358 Kostof, p. 55.
359 Ibid.
360 Kostof, pp. 53–54.
The above can be seen as exhibiting combinations of man-made and natural urban determinants that have influenced their urban form. However, it should be noted that there are disagreements between urban historians and geographers as to which of these factors is most important. These academic disagreements regarding urban form are beyond the scope of this research, which would not benefit from favouring one or the other theory. However, my own view is very much identified with that of Wheatly, who explains:
It is doubtful if a single autonomous, causative factor will ever be identified in the nexus of social, economic, and political transformation which resulted in the emergence of urban forms, but one activity does seem in a sense to command a sort of priority... this does not mean religion (here defined for limited purposes as a set of symbolic forms and acts which relates man to the ultimate condition of his existence) was a primary causative factor, but rather that it permeated all activities, all institutional change; and afforded a consensual focus for social life.\textsuperscript{361}

By extension, it could be said that urban causality is complex and so one single common factor cannot be responsible for shaping the urban form of all cities. However, it could become the focal point and primary factor. For instance, the role of the temple as a primary factor can be seen in the layout plan of the city of Ur (Figure 3). The effect of climate on the creation of the courtyard house can also be seen as an important factor in Islamic urban culture and cities in West Asia. It should be highlighted that the urban form of most traditional cities in West Asia within the Islamic culture originated and was based on pre-Islamic ancient Mesopotamian and Sumerian cities.\textsuperscript{362} Many Sumerian cities shared the same urban form and design, as has been shown in the layout plan of Ur, the walled city, the religious section and the residential area. Oppenheim also indicates that ‘the typical Sumerian city, and probably most of the later cities consisted of three parts. First, the city proper the walled area which contains the temple or temples, the palace with the residences of the royal officials, and the houses of the citizens’.\textsuperscript{363}

The effect of climate was also a crucial factor when designing residential areas. An example of this is courtyard housing design, where the house is located around a courtyard, usually with a fountain or small pool (\textit{Hozcheh} in Farsi) in the middle, which would improve the aesthetic and also serve as a natural air-


\textsuperscript{362} Hakim.

conditioning system.\textsuperscript{364} The rooms with windows would face the courtyard, and the courtyard itself would be used as a protective barrier against windblown dust (Figure 6). The courtyard design became the trademark of traditional Iranian housing architecture, which subsequently influenced the urban form and planning of most cities in Iran (Figures 7–8).


Courtyard architectural elements have a long history in traditional Iranian housing. The design can be traced back as far as about the end of 7th or middle of the 6th century BCE, when the Achaemenid Dynasty took over many cities in the west plateau of Iran. Under Cyrus the Great, states such as Elam, Media, Babylonia and Egypt became incorporated into the Achaemenian Empire.\textsuperscript{365} As


Ardalan observes, ‘the Achaemenid period provides examples of many courtyard dwellings, while the Parthian palace of Ashure, and the Sasanian palaces at Firuzabad and Sarwistan indicate courtyard plans of great sophistication’. Subsequently, the ancient way of life, urban form and architecture were to become assimilated into Islamic urban culture after the Arab conquest. The typical architectural elements of the traditional courtyard design reflect a number of factors. Some of these factors, such as climate, socio-ethical concerns, the economy and religion were mentioned above, and are a combination of natural-world determinants and man-made determinants. However, in the following sub-chapter, Islamic architecture and urban form will be discussed in more depth.

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366 Ardalan and Bakhtiar, p. 68.
Figure 8. Typical structure of courtyard houses. Courtesy of Stefano Bianca, *Urban Form in the Arab World: Past and Present*. This typical structure of a residential area or Mahale shows the different shapes and sizes of houses. There is only one main entrance to this Mahale, and the route inside consists of alleyways and twisted curves. The white square inside each of these houses is the fountain or *Hozche*. Other smaller squares can be seen in a few houses as small patches for creating a mini-garden or green space (see also Figure 6).

Figure 9. Typical structure of a residential district. Courtesy of Stefano Bianca, *Urban Form in the Arab World: past and present*. This district consists of four residential areas or Mahale. There are two entrances to this district. One is from the south side and one from the middle. Access to each residential area, as shown in Figure 7, is only possible through the one main entrance. Each Mahale is an enclosure that consists of different numbers of housing blocks.
Islamic Architecture and Urban Form

The Arab Islamic empire in the seventh century became a major world power after the Arab conquest co-opted many ancient dynasties and countries, including Persia. Persia—or, as it is known today, Iran—like many other Islamic countries, had a long pre-Islamic history. It was an ancient civilisation whose way of life came into conflict with the Islamic way of organising life. The pre-Islamic past was the foundation of the Muslim city experience; from the past came a very different society dominated by a hierarchical form of social organisation. From the past came also complex techniques of industries and crafts.367

However, the traditional Iranian city has been called the ‘Islamic city’, the ‘Muslim city’ or the ‘Middle Eastern city’.368 Before exploring the Iranian city, it is necessary to identify the characteristics of the Islamic city or Islamic architecture. Secondly, it is important to find out if all the cities that have been built for and by Muslims are for religious purposes. And lastly, it must be decided whether the cities and architecture that have been built in predominantly Muslim countries be regarded as having Islamic architecture. Islam, as a religion, started in Arabia (known today as Saudi Arabia, Oman and Yemen) in the beginning of the 7th century BCE. The story of Islam began in the desert in a small town called Mecca, and its prophet was Muhamad. ‘By the end of the 8th century A.D. the Islamic empire had extended, reaching India and China in the east and Spain and Morocco in the west’.369 This expansion by Muslim Arabs has been considered a significant factor in urbanisation in West Asian countries, with the introduction of a new urban form, which became known as the Muslim city.370 This view has its supporters but has also been


368 Ibid.

369 AlSayyad, p. 2.

370 AlSayyad, pp. 2–3.
challenged. It does not seem essential to enter into the discussion of whether Islam was the cause of urbanisation or not. However, it can be assumed that, to some extent, urbanisation accompanied the spread of Islam. ‘The land of Islam, however, seems to have reached the height of its urbanisation trend within three centuries of the introduction of the new religion’. To compare this situation with Christian Europe during the Middle Ages, it is important to look at the context in which Christianity became the new religion of the Roman Empire. The collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th century led to the formation of mediaeval Christendom; after the collapse of the empire, urban life in Europe reduced considerably until around the 11th century.

Throughout the Middle Ages, collections of villages merged into towns and new towns were founded, but the rate of this transformation was slow until the 13th century. With regard to mediaeval urbanisation and the urban form, ‘not only is the political, economic and social context extremely complex, but also the towns themselves present an almost infinite variety of forms’. For instance, because they were part of the Roman Empire, Mediterranean cities were different from cities in central and northern Europe. Also, North African and West Asian cities were part of the empire, and each had their own particular shape and form. Nevertheless, in the context of urban development several key factors have been considered influential, including feudalism and the revival of trade and commerce, mostly in wool, coal and iron, of which the Church as a religious institution played an important role.

Although ‘religion played an important role in shaping mediaeval European city form, it was only among many other factors. It remains important to note that we speak of mediaeval European cities and not of Christian cities’. This situation creates an interesting dichotomy between the cities of Christian Europe and Islamic cities. Although the mosque as a religious institution did not

571 AlSayyad, p. 4.

572 Morris.

573 Ibid, p. 92.

574 Ibid, p. 93.

575 Ibid.

576 AlSayyad, p. 4.
possess political power to the extent that it would affect the urban form of the cities, the Church as a religious institution did.

As AlSayyad explains:

[The] palace and the cathedral played an important visual role representing political and religious power. The absence of an established clerical hierarchy in Islam may explain this difference. The mosque as the religious symbols and place of worship in Islam [italics mine] was mainly a social and political institution that did not possess an independent source of authority as did the cathedral. It was primarily the means by which power was transmitted and the place where equality between ruler and ruled was manifested.377

In most Muslim societies, the relationship between state and religion is very strong, although this did not necessarily influence the urban fabric in the same way as in mediaeval European cities.378 Perhaps there are similarities in their physical and urban structures that have been attributed to these cities and came to be known as Islamic. Janet Abu Lughod describes this dichotomy as follows (quoted by AlSayyad):

While the diversity is striking and defies simplification to a single genre of either architecture or urban form, it is equally remarkable that one always knows when one is in the presence of an Islamic civilization. Is it merely the superficial decoration, the insistently repetitive arches, the geometry of tiny spaces aggregating to vast designs that signal the code? Is it the basic architectonic concept of a square-horizontal and rounded vertical space that announces the unity underlying external diversity in shape? Is it the overall emphasis upon enclosing, enfolding, involving, protecting and covering that one finds alike in single structure, in quarters, indeed in the entire city? There appears to be certain basic “deep structure” to the language of Islamic expression in space.379

377 AlSayyad, p. 5.

378 AlSayyad.

379 Ibid, p. 5.
Lughod’s description can be taken as a general idea of how some architectural elements and physical layouts are common characteristics in Muslim cities. But at the same time, differences remain. However, it is understandable that these similarities represent a common notion of traditional Muslim urban settlements. For instance, a typical description goes as follows:

The Muslim city is a city whose central node is a Masjid jame, or Friday mosque, with a well-defined and somewhat central royal quarter and a qasabah or a major spine extending from one main gate to another along which lies the most important buildings scattered along the linear bazaar which branches out into the city forming irregular but functionally well-defined specialized markets. The city also has a citadel or a defensive post on the outskirts and this seems to tie well with its successive walls. Housing was mainly made up of inward oriented core residential quarters, each allocated to a particular group of residents and each is served by a single dead-end street. As for its spatial structure, the Muslim city had no large open public spaces and the spaces serving its movement and traffic network were narrow, irregular and disorganized paths that do not seem to represent any specific spatial conception.380

This description regards the spatial structure of a traditional Muslim settlement without any rationale. In other words, it ignores the form of the city in its totality in relation to the function that it serves. Another description of the physical form of a traditional Muslim settlement, by George Marcais, is as follows (quoted in AlSayyad):

In the heart of the city there is the Friday mosque which is the religious, intellectual and political centre, we find the suq of sacred items where merchants sell candles, incense, and perfumes. Also, near the mosque, as an intellectual centre, we find book sellers and the book binders. As we go further from the mosque, we find the suqs of clothes and leather which were often located in secure places encircled by walls called qaisariya. Beyond the textile trades we find the markets of jewellers, the furniture makers and the kitchen utensils. Near the gates, we find the weekly markets where goods from the countryside are sold. Finally, on the periphery, we find the industrial trades like blacksmiths, the dyers, and the tanners.381

What is really interesting in the two descriptions quoted above is that in both the mosque is seen as the focal point of the city and a bazaar. The circulation of

380 AlSayyad, p. 6.
381 AlSayyad, p. 15.
traffic networks has been described as narrow and irregular, disorganised pathways that do not represent any planned spatial conception. Although the passage above elaborates on the typical Muslim market, it is equally important to note that the description above is unique to the Maghreb and does not apply to other regions. There are other extreme developments in the description of the physical qualities of Muslim cities. Another example is by Xavier De Planhol:

Irregularity and anarchy seem to be the most striking qualities of Islamic cities. The effect of Islam is essentially negative. It substitutes for a solid unified collectivity, a shifting and inorganic assemblage of districts; it walls off and divides up the face of the city. By a truly remarkable paradox, this religion that inculcates an ideal of city life leads directly to a negation of urban order.

It can be seen that De Planhol has also adopted a stereotyped position towards Muslim cities. Negative descriptions like these have been commonly used by scholars in discussing Islamic cities. It is clear that De Planhol sees the physical characteristics of Muslim cities through a biased perspective, and so sees them as evidence of the inadequacy of Islam. He clearly fails to see the whole picture in regard to the other influential urban determinants shaping cities. It appears that this stereotype was adopted by many scholars of Muslim cities in both East and West. It is also interesting to note that West Asian and Arab scholars within the field of urban study and city planning have shied away from highlighting these stereotypical observations. As AlSayyad states:

It is ironic that the Arab scholars working on the subject of the Muslim city chose not to contradict the existing authoritative body of literature produced by orientalists in spite of their awareness of some of its fallacies. It is even more ironic that they chose not to return to the early Arab sources but instead adopted many unproven notions nurtured by Westerners about the Muslim city. Their desire to gain legitimacy among their European peers led

\[382\] Ibid.

them to participate in the academic construction of a myth and institutionalization of inaccurate knowledge on the Muslim city.\footnote{AlSayyad, p. 33.}

In other words, AlSayyad is saying that part of the misunderstanding on the subject of Muslim cities is because of a lack of Arabs and West Asians participating in establishing a more accurate knowledge, as well as the inherently Eurocentric view of Western scholars. However, R. A. Jairazbhoy, an Indian scholar, in his book *Art and Cities of Islam*, responds to Planhol as follows:

First of all, irregularity has always been alien to Islamic art, and indeed in architectural design there is usually an over-zealous desire for symmetry. The irregularities of streets in Muslim towns are the result of subsequent haphazard growth and the absence of controlling authority. It is people who are at fault, not the system, which is itself clear, consistent and rational. Because of its very desire for clarity and logic, and because it respects the different ways of living of different races and religious, Islam was anxious to ensure the independence and safety of the inhabitants; racial segregation was a recognition of the innate desire of peoples to live amid their own kind, and the grouping of the crafts resulted in competition fair pricing, and ease locating any object the buyer might require. These are the real reasons the Islamic town character took the character that it did.\footnote{R. A. Jairazbhoy, *Art and Cities of Islam* (Rawalpindi: Ferozsons, 1996).}

Jairazbhoy’s response refutes some of the hostile statements made before, and provides more reliable information about the overall organisation of Muslim cities. Despite the claims of irregularity, Jairazbhoy’s point is that Islamic art and architecture are, in essence, about symmetry and the rational repetition of patterns. However, Jairazbhoy sees the irregularity of the so-called Muslim cities as the result of authorities’ lack of control and general human error, rather than as a sign of organic urban growth, as was the characteristic of the old Boston city.

It is rather refreshing to see an Asian scholar representing another view in contrast to stereotypical observations made by orientalist scholars. However, for AlSayyad, his references and sources in relation to the elements of Muslim cities can be traced back to the same Western stereotypes of the scholarly orientalists.
whose works are mentioned above. AlSayyad refers to this description as a stereotypical model for representing Muslim cities.

For AlSayyad, this stereotypical model does not adequately convey the form and function of Muslim cities. This approach is inappropriate as it does not take into consideration the factor of time and the nature of urban growth. As has been seen, there are variations in describing Muslim cities. In all of the descriptions above, a basic concept and belief is common: that Islamic planning ideology had a profound influence on the historical and physical evolution of cities in West Asia.

There might be some truth in the representation of the historical reality of some of the cities in West Asia. But it should also be taken into account that the stereotypical picture of Muslim cities became the standard description. This led to a methodological approach that studied these cities from a Western understanding of the urban entity, using a standard that was not suitable for comparing the social organisation of Muslim cities with Western cities.

Consequently, such flawed comparisons had a huge impact on the traditional inner logic of such cities. Scholars such as Gustave Von Grunebaum, De Planhol, the Marcais brothers and others tried to reconstruct an image of Muslim cities without analysing the qualities of these cities on their own terms and within their cultural context. All of this scholarly work laid the foundation for further research and analysis, 'although much of the writing of this early group was produced from a colonialist perspective'. Among the scholars mentioned above, Von Grunebaum's description of the Muslim city became the primary source and was adopted by others. The stereotypical Muslim city as identified by Van Grunebaum can be seen in the following statement (quoted in AlSayyad):

386 AlSayyad, pp. 23–24.

387 AlSayyad, p. 6.

The Islamic town did not represent a uniform type of civilized life as had the Greek or Roman town... deliberate imitation of a superior cultural standard in the Muslim city does occur but is rare.\textsuperscript{389}

In making this comment, Von Grunebaum shows clearly that, to him, the Muslim city was incapable of innovation and creative development. It shows, as Edward Said noted, Van Grunebaum’s almost virulent dislike of Islam.\textsuperscript{390} This also indicates that the stereotyped model of the Muslim city was not only influenced by the biases of orientalist scholarship but also, at base, by political ideologies.

Said also mentions that:

Von Grunebaum has fallen prey both to the orientalist dogmas he inherited and to the particular features of Islam which he has chosen to interpret as shortcomings. ... Von Grunebaum’s Islam, after all, is the Islam of the earlier European orientalists-monolithic, scornful of ordinary human experience, gross, reductive, unchanging.\textsuperscript{391}

The result of Von Grunebaum’s work on the Muslim city was an orientalist interpretation incapable of doing justice to, or even representing, elements of the existential reality of the experience of its habitants.

For example, in the case of Iran, when the Arabs overthrew the Sasanian dynasty (633–654 CE) in the 7th century, they encountered an ancient way of life with a long history of urban living. Therefore, the pre-Islamic organisation of life became the foundation of the Muslim experience. As a result, the Islamic influence on traditional Iranian architecture and urban form must be seen in the context of pre-Islamic times. As Lapidus contends:

The Arab conquest did not introduce urbanity, but for quite specific reasons they lent special imputes to the construction and expansion of cities and towns. Cities had to be built to canton Bedouin peoples migrating from Arabia in order to prevent them from dispersing, seizing and dividing the

\textsuperscript{389} AlSayyad, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{390} Said, p. 296.
\textsuperscript{391} Said, pp. 298–99.
conquered lands into individual or tribal properties; and to segregate them from the conquered peoples so that they could be organized into armies for future campaigns.\textsuperscript{392}

In other words, the typical Muslim city can be regarded as an invention of scholars, who described this kind of urban setting in terms of norms and standards that were developed elsewhere. As Nezar AlSayyad explains:

Those scholars were, in fact, unequipped with some of the current methodological approaches that may have allowed them, had they been available, the chance to define such an entity in terms of itself. Of course, there is nothing wrong with observing the Muslim city in a comparative context as those early scholars were attempting to do. The problem existed because such observations were not incorporated in any appropriate comparative framework and were mainly a reflection of Western modes of representation.\textsuperscript{393}

Moreover, it should be noted that the whole enterprise of comparative framework was based on the juxtaposition of Muslim cities with their mediaeval European counterparts. Part of why this juxtaposition was made could be related to the discourse of orientalism and Western scholars studying other civilisations. Orientalism can be a vehicle for domination.\textsuperscript{394} Orientalist scholars looked for comparable institutions and parallel historical developments between Mediaeval European cities and Islamic cities. It is not surprising that this school of thought lapsed into negative descriptions, as they found little or nothing that was comparable. There is a fundamental error with this line of enquiry, which compares the ideal of one culture (Greco-Roman-Renaissance in the West) with the reality of traditional West Asian cities. Additionally, another influential factor in making comparisons between Muslim cities and mediaeval European counterparts could be seen in the Weberian notion of the particular characteristics that make a city. Max Weber was a German sociologist and

\textsuperscript{392} Brown and Lapidus, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{393} AlSayyad, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{394} Said, p. 3.
historian whose ideas profoundly influenced social theory and scholars of urban history. His influence is present in the work of medievalists and orientalists.395

In his book *The City* (1966), Weber suggested that there are five characteristics that distinguish mediaeval European cities: fortification, markets, an administrative and legal system, a distinctive urban form and partial autonomy.396 Weber claimed that the purest form of cities only existed in mediaeval Europe. He further maintained that, as Asiatic cities lack some of the characteristics mentioned above, they cannot be considered cities.397 As AlSayyad reminds us, ‘Weberian thought, coupled with the formalist tendencies of early orientalists, created an atmosphere that was conducive to the evolution of the first stereotype, and further making generalisation and juxtaposition about the form and nature of Muslim cities [italics mine]’.398 This is a problematic assertion that totally ignored other factors such as natural urban determinants as well as manmade determinants, as discussed earlier in this thesis. These influenced the physical and urban form of Muslim cities. Moreover, the development of cities, regardless of the region and geographical location, is the result of interrelated factors.

Therefore, the idea of forming conquered cities according to Islamic principles and ideologies would not hold any validity. Up until the election of Abu Bakr (632–634, in the Arabian Peninsula) as the successor of prophet Mohamad, there had not been any foreign conquest by the Arabs. Consequently, clashes between Arab tribes on the borders of Syria and Iraq led to other expeditions against the Byzantine Empire and Sassanid in Iran.399 To fully understand Muslim cities and their architecture, and explain their evolution and the circumstances of the conquered countries, Arabs’ relationships with their cultural environment should be taken into consideration. For instance, some of the men who formed the Arab armies were desert dwellers, Badawi, especially from nomadic Arab desert tribes.

395 AlSayyad, p. 34.


397 Ibid, pp. 91–96.

398 AlSayyad, p. 34.

There are many books on Arab culture, Muslim Arabs, and the life and death of Islam’s founding prophet Muhammad, particularly from the 7th century, when the Islamic conquest started to expand its territories. The pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula’s history and the life of its inhabitants who lived alongside two great empires, the Roman and Persian, is little known. It might be thought that part of this neglect is based on the preconception that most people in the Arabian Peninsula were tribal nomads and camel riders whose way of life before the emergence of Islam made an insignificant contribution to world history. There had been different tribes and cultures who inhabited different parts of Arabia. In fact, as Morris reminds us:

Contrary to possible preconception, not all of the northern Arabs were nomads. There were tribes that came to prefer a settled agricultural existence in one of the village oases, or that of merchants in one of the exceedingly few and far cities. The nomads needed marketplace opportunity to trade their animals for basics commodities.

What the passage above is indicating is that there had been trading centres and permanent settlements in various parts of the Arabian Peninsula. For instance, the city of Makkah, located in the eastern mountain foothills, was one of the oldest and most prosperous trading centres in 571 CE. In fact, the name Arabian Peninsula refers to pre-Islamic Arabia, before the rise of Islam in 630 CE. Pre-Islamic religion consisted of indigenous polytheistic beliefs based on a variety of spirits. Other religious systems such as Ancient Arabian Christianity, Nestorian Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism also existed amongst the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula. One of the most important nomadic tribes in pre-Islamic Arabia was that of the Bedouin people. The social relationship

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amongst the Bedouin was heavily based on kin-related clans, and each clan shared one tent.⁴⁰³ Although there were other important tribes such as the Ghassan, Salih, Kinda and Lakhmi, it not all of these led a nomadic life, as Arab tribes are usually understood to.⁴⁰⁴ As mentioned above, there were also important urban settlements that were crucial for trade and religion, such as Makkah, Madina (Yathrib), Karbala and Damascus. Therefore, tribes and settlers were not in conflict all the time.

As Greg Fisher observes:

Advances in anthropology have, however, demonstrated that ‘settled’ people share aspects of their society, culture, and economy with nomads, and that nomads pursue a diversity of lifestyles, including the raising the crops—an activity associated, for ancient observers, with ‘civilized’, settled peoples. While often very different in terms of their characteristics, it is thus misleading to always see nomads and settlers, tribes and states, as diametric opposites.⁴⁰⁵

What Fisher is indicating here is that tribal groups and urban settlers in the Arabian Peninsula had a dynamic political relationship and cultural contact with each other. One other thing that could be understood from the passage above is that the Peninsula has a variety of landscapes, religions, social groups and costumes. For instance, in antiquity the Greco-Romans called the southwestern part of the Peninsula Arabia felix or Happy Arabia.⁴⁰⁶ Southwestern Arabia, or, as it is known today, Yemen, was ‘a land of towering mountains, beautiful coastal plains and plunging valleys, which is endowed with the double blessing of monsoon rains and aromatic plants’.⁴⁰⁷ For the Persian empire and its administration, Arabia was mostly a district between Assyria and Egypt; east and northeast of the Peninsula, which in contrast to Arabia felix was named Arabia deserta, due to its dry, challenging landscape and lack of water

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⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.


⁴⁰⁶ Greg Fisher.

⁴⁰⁷ Hoyland, p. 4.
resources. Therefore, to define the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula, one should consider the diversity of climate, topography and landscape.

It is equally important to bear in mind that, regarding the study of architecture, assumptions were made that ‘Arabia at the rise of Islam, does not appear to have possessed anything worthy of the name of architecture, but almost constituted a perfect architectural vacuum’. From the earlier discussions in this thesis, it is known that preconceptions and sweeping generalisations have been made regarding components of Muslim cities and their architecture. As mentioned earlier, various tribes and cultures lived in different parts of Arabia. As a result of a lack of natural resources and the topography, much of the country did not lend itself to monumental or lavish architecture. It should be stressed that, despite the remoteness of some tribes and the fact that these different tribes and regions had their own trading systems, pre-Islamic Arabia did interact with its neighbouring powers. As Robert G. Hoyland, in his book *Arabia and the Arabs* (2001), asserts:

> Economic and political links inevitably brought in their wake new artistic products and style. Since the different regions of Arabia had different trading patterns and political allies, and were at varying distances from power, they were exposed to different foreign influences. They also had different local traditions and different raw materials available to them. Hence, the art and architecture of Arabia exhibits much regional diversity.

Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to say that through this interaction a whole new way of life and organising society opened up for both sides. For instance, the east side of Arabia was influenced by Mesopotamian and Persian (Iranian) ideas, the Hellenism effect was dominant in the northeast, and south Arabia mostly produced its own form and material culture. However, later on,

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408 Greg Fisher.

409 Creswell.

410 Hoyland, p. 167.
Hellenistic and Roman art and architecture had an impact, too. What this might indicate for this research is that, because the cultural and material conditions in each part varied and were influenced by different cultures, the end result was rather a 'blending of foreign style with local taste'.

This blending of style and reciprocal exchange continued, even after the rise of Islam and the conquest of neighbouring countries by Muslim Arabs. Furthermore, in those early days, when a country was conquered the invaders encountered different cultural materials. These cultural encounters took different paths in each country. For instance, in Iran, the situation was totally different than in northeast Arabia. At the time when Arabs conquered Iran and took power, the Sasanian empire was in control of Iran. Therefore, what they inherited was quite different compared to other conquered societies.

The Sasanian dynasty (224–650 CE) was the last Persian empire to have control over much of Western Asia before the rise of Islam. The rise of the Sasanian empire was a result of the decline in the Parthian state brought about by internal civil unrest, a devastating epidemic and repeated wars with the Roman empire. The first Sasanian ruler was Ardasir I (224–241), who succeeded in creating the Persian empire and elevated Zoroastrianism to be the state religion of Persia. It was recognised for over four centuries as one of the two great powers in Western Asia, alongside the Roman empire in Europe. Ardasir left a legacy as a model king who was interested in creating cities, and it has been suggested that he personally founded at least eight cities.

The last king of the Sasanian dynasty was Yazdgerd III (632–650 CE). By this time, the Arabs were inspired by their new faith, Islam, and were on a military expedition to expand their territories and religion. The first major confrontation between the Arab army and the Persians was near a place called Ubbla. The Arabs succeeded in defeating the Persian army in the battle of Qadesiya,

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411 Hoyland.

412 Ibid.

413 'Sasanian Empire', Ancient History Encyclopedia <https://www.ancient.eu/Sasanian_Empire/> [accessed 27 November 2018].

414 Ibid.

415 Ibid.
southwest of Hira. They subjugated the local nobles either by force or by treaty and succeeded in destroying the Persian empire by 650 CE.\textsuperscript{416} Although the last years of Yazdgerd III’s reign were inglorious and characterised by disarray, as Shahbazi observes, ‘the Sasanian state remained the ideal model of organisation, splendour, and justice in Perso-Arabic tradition; and its bureaucracy and royal ideology were imitated by successor states, especially the Abbasid, Ottoman, and Safavid empires’.\textsuperscript{417}

Furthermore, it is not totally clear when the Arabs started their architectural activities in Iran. Most of the buildings have been destroyed or decayed; only a few remain. It is only through these remaining monuments and thorough archaeological excavations that it would be possible to make assumptions about the development of Islamic architecture in Iran. The first assumption is that, after the Arab conquest, building construction methods remained as they had been during the Sasanian empire. The Muslims in Iran mostly employed pre-existing buildings for their needs. The second assumption is that Islam brought only one new form, the mosque. Finally, it is assumed that a number of official forms and decorative techniques like the \textit{ayvan}, the dome above the square hall and stucco were adapted for Islamic buildings all over the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{418} As Creswell observes:

\begin{quote}
In Persia, the Muslims apparently utilized existing buildings also, for Muqaddasi says: ‘the Friday Mosque at Istakhr (Persepolis) … is constructed after the fashion of the congregational mosque of Syria with round columns; on the top of each column is a cow. They say that it was formerly a Temple of Fire’. From the reference to bull-headed capitals, I conclude that it was originally an \textit{apadana}, or hypostyle of the Persian kings, with a flat roof resting on columns with double bull-headed capitals.\textsuperscript{419} (See Figure 1.)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{416} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{417} A. Shapur Shahbazi, ‘Sasanian Dynasty’, in \textit{Encyclopædia Iranica} \url{http://wwwiranicaonlineorg/articles/sasanian-dynasty}.

\textsuperscript{418} Grabar, Oleg, ‘Architecture V. Islamic, Pre-Safavid’, in \textit{Encyclopaedia Iranica}, <\texttt{http://wwwiranicaonlineorg/articles/architecture-v}> [accessed 19 November 2018].

\textsuperscript{419} Creswell, pp. 7–8.
What this shows is that, firstly, the existing buildings the Arab conquerors found suited their needs. Therefore, they did not need to embark on any immediate architectural activity. This has also been stressed by one of the prominent Muslim philosophers and scholars, Ibn Khaldoun. In one of his treatises called *Mughaddameh* or 'Introduction to History', he writes of architectural activities in conquered areas: ‘at the beginning, their religion forbade them to do any excessive building or to waste too much money on building activities for no purpose’. And, secondly, when they started their architectural endeavours, it was with adaptation of ancient Iranian architectural elements and indigenous regional forms. Additionally, under Islamic rulers, techniques were adapted to suit the climate and used local materials because of availability and to reduce the cost of domestic architecture, noble houses as well as religious buildings for the majority of cities.

With regard to Islamic influence on the urban form and physical shape of conquered cities, as Lapidus notes, ‘Cities and civilizations- the words, the concepts, the experiences are implicit in each other. The study of traditional Muslim cities touches on all aspects of Islamic civilization, and to understand traditional Muslim cities we must appraise the historical context in which they have developed’. Therefore, Iranian cities, with their ancient urban way of life modified with Islamic influence, created an astonishing architecture and urban form that lasted for centuries. This urban form had its own logic and was responsive to the topography and geography of the Middle Eastern environment.

As discussed earlier in this thesis, stereotypes of West Asian cities and urban form were based on the idea that the urban form of these cities is chaotic, disorganised and lacks any rational arrangement in comparison to European cities. Cross-cultural comparison of two different urban conditions, i.e., the Western urban form and architecture with traditional West Asian cities in order to glorify and idealise the former against the latter is a fundamental error that results in making hazy generalisations. Moreover, traditional West Asian urban style with its rich heritage was diluted when confronted with the intrusive juxtaposition of Western urban style. Broad boulevards, a grid pattern of

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421 Michell.

422 Brown and Lapidus.
streets, straight lines and wide avenues, mega shopping malls and high-rise tower blocks are all examples of the impact of Western planning, which will be discussed in more depth in this chapter.

Perhaps it is necessary to trace back this Western influence on the Islamic world to shed light on the historical roots of some of the stereotypes mentioned earlier. The confrontation between traditional West Asian cities and modern Western systems has to be viewed in a wider philosophical context. This will involve the examination and interpretation of concepts such as ‘modernity’, ‘progress’, ‘development’ and ‘scientific methods’. These have been discussed in depth in the introduction and the chapter of nature. However, in the following section, I will explore some of the basic principles of urban form and spatial structure of traditional West Asian cities, particularly Iranian cities, in relation to the concepts mentioned above.
Basic Principle of Urban Form and Spatial Structure

There are interrelated factors that shape the urban form and physical structure of every cultural tradition. These factors can be manmade, involving religion, economics, history and social power. Or they can be natural or environmental like topography, climate and availability of natural resources. These interrelated factors create an equation between people and the physical shape of cities. ‘And this equation works in both senses: man structures his environment, while he is also influenced and confirmed by it in his attitudes as a result of interacting with it over time’. Therefore, emphasising only one of these factors at the expense of the others, be it religion or another factor, would not represent the whole truth, or be a thorough scholarly endeavour. As shown earlier, to view Islam as the only major influence in the evolution of traditional Middle Eastern cities would be lazy and would ignore the rich cultural heritage of the conquered countries. Compare the situation with mediaeval European cities, for which Christianity was viewed as one of many factors shaping the urban form and physical aspects of mediaeval European cities. Almost all the cities are known as European, not Christian cities. As Bianca observes:

All spiritually founded traditions - and Islam is one them - aimed at materializing and manifesting their individual perception of universal truth, filtered through the “medium” of their own cultural conditions. Therefore, the various religious doctrines, in spite of relative differences originating from their embodiment in specific communities, times and places, do not necessary exclude, but complement each other; they all represent particular aspects of a sacred universe or, in other words, different approximations to the supreme reality which can never be fully captured by man.

Bianca implies here that, regardless of the religious institution, whether it be Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or another form of sacred beliefs, despite their distinct interpretations of the relationship between the spiritual and material worlds, share one crucial aspect: the representation of universal truth. From my perspective, this would manifest itself in the way communities organise their life and the built environment. Therefore, it would be no surprise that life and physical expressions are linked to religious values to some extent. Due to the

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423 Bianca, pp. 22–23.

424 Ibid.
character, cultural conditions and historical circumstances, any form of religion will have different laws and social customs. However, as Bianca avers:

In a certain way, the comprehensive social rules of Islam may even be compared to those of the monastic orders in medieval Europe, except for the fact that orthodox Islam never accepted the dualism between the “spiritual” and the “material” realm and never introduced a distinct class of celery or any special preconditions for a contemplative life, such as celibacy. Therefore, it can be said that the “monastic” aspect of Islam was diffused and integrated into society as a whole.425

Bianca is indicating the rejection of the separation between the spiritual and material world in Islam. Muslim theologians and philosophers tried to bridge the gap between the two worlds via the concept of unity or Tawhid, which was discussed earlier in this research. The other thing that should be touched upon is that, due to the diffusion and integration of monastic characteristics into society, the mosque never had the same form and power as European cathedrals did. In other words, the mosque did not have institutional influence and power like European cathedrals did. As AlSayyad explains, ‘the mosque was mainly a social and political institution that did not possess an independent source of authority as did the cathedral’.426 For AlSayyad, this difference can be explained by the lack of established clerical hierarchy in Islam and the fact that the sphere of Islam was vast and may not be regarded as a single geographic region.427 Perhaps the most significant social implication of this would be that all other political and societal issues would have been resolved in the mosque. However, this was ‘except in cases where the prestige of royal sponsors was involved. While being the major religious building, it usually remained a polyvalent structure integrated into the urban fabric, with no intention of expressing the power of religious or secular authorities’.428


426 AlSayyad, p. 5.

427 Ibid.

428 Bianca, p. 30.
For instance, in relation to traditional Iranian cities, there is no doubt that the mosque plays an important role and is a mandatory element of the urban fabric. But there are other crucial elements of the city such as the bazaar or even other religious elements such as imamzadeh and husayniyeh (a place for a descendant of an Imam that is also used for religious events and for worship).\footnote{Masoud Kheirabadi, \textit{Iranian Cities: Formation and Development} (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000).}

Moreover, as Kheirabadi explicates:

In a traditional Iranian city, the Friday Mosque is often considered one of the main elements of the bazar complex and, in many cases, the focus of the bazar, where there are more crowds and activities. However, unlike the popular belief postulated by the model of the Islamic city, it is not the mosque but the bazar that forms the centre and actual focus of the typical traditional Iranian city.\footnote{Ibid, p. 65.}

The typical description of a traditional Middle Eastern city, in the case of Iran, is vice versa. It is the bazar that is the actual focal point of the traditional Iranian city.

Therefore, the emphasis on the importance of mosques as the main influential element of the urban form and physical environment, placed by the scholars mentioned earlier in this chapter, is an overstatement and, as AlSayyad rightly suggests, a stereotypical view of such cities. Thus far, religious structure and the role of mosques in Muslim society have been discussed. In the following sections, other public elements of the city will be studied in relation to social and political structure. Finally, I will discuss residential neighbourhoods and their place within the city. One of the important social characteristics and the practice of Islamic religious order was to limit the investment of spiritual and political authority in one single person. As Bianca explains:

From the beginning, Islam had excluded the concept of sacred kingship, as it was common in Asia, and even during European Middle Ages. No caliph or sultan was ever bestowed with legislative authority, and the role of the Islamic ruler was only to “promote the right and to prevent the evil” in accordance with the given Islamic law which he had to implement.\footnote{Bianca, p. 26.}
The exclusion of the concept of kingship by religious limitation enhanced the power of the clergy or ulama. Consequently, matters of daily life and community disputes became the ulama's responsibility. In other words, they became the legitimate representative of the population, the civil servants of the society. Additionally, each part of the city or neighbourhood had its community leaders for providing services and ensure wellbeing. The social implications of this inbuilt system contributed to the lack of formal administrative structures. As Bianca observes:

Perhaps the most significant social implication of Islam was the fact that the strength of its ritualized living patterns dispensed with the need for many formal institutions. A large number of administrative structures which are normally identified with cities - at least in Europe - did not develop, simply because the society had internalized its structuring constraints, which minimized the need for external controls. Its coercing mechanism worked from within, so to speak, and needed little or no institutional support. Traditional Islamic cities had no municipalities comparable to those of the Western world, and the crown and the church in the institutional sense of Medieval Europe did not exist.

The absence of administrative institutions was also a characteristic of traditional Iranian cities. The only monumental government building was the palace or the arg (Figure 9). The form and function of the arg varied considerably, depending on factors such as the size of the city, the historical period and the political importance of the city. Args were considered the most important urban element of the cities, usually built on the highest terrain where defence would be possible. Therefore, as a result of internalised structuring and a lack of other formal institutions, except for royal args or palaces, traditional Iranian cities

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432 Bianca, p. 27.
433 Bianca, p. 28.
434 Kheirabadi, p. 77.
435 Ibid.
followed an organic growth pattern. Furthermore, the physical geography and internal structure of the cities were determined by the natural environment, such as the climate characteristics, water and topography of the Iranian plateau. As discussed earlier in this thesis, these factors are called natural world determinants, and play a huge part in shaping the urban form of cities. Therefore, the urban structure of the traditional Iranian city took the shape it did due to the cultural–historical response to its particular natural determinants.

In terms of natural determinants, to a great extent, the location of most cities has been determined by the physical geography of the country. Iran has an area of 1,648,195 km² (636,372 square miles). It lies between 24° and 40° N latitude and 44° and 64° E longitude. It is bordered by the Caspian Sea to the north and to the south by the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Iran

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436 Kheirabadi, p. 10.

437 Ibid.

consists of chains of mountain ranges that rise steeply above sea level. The Iranian plateau, with the exception of the coasts of the Caspian Sea and Khuzestan, is one of the world’s most mountainous countries. Its landscape is dominated by rugged mountain ranges that separate the various basins or plateaus from one another. The populous western part is the most mountainous, with ranges such as the Caucasus, Zagros and Alborz.\textsuperscript{439}

Climate and weather conditions in Iran vary in different regions depending on the location. This can be regarded as a significant factor. As discussed earlier, climate falls in the category of natural urban determinants that shape urban and housing planning depending on the local climatic circumstances. In general, because of the vast mountain ranges and the location of the land, the country is considered dry and mostly barren. These high mountain ranges prevent the moist and humid wind from reaching the central areas of the country.

As Kheirabadi also discusses:

Through the millennia, the urban form of Iranian cities developed to cope with such climatic conditions. To adjust to the hostile climate, traditional Iranian urban planners learned to minimize the direct impact of solar radiation, to soften the blow of harmful and unpleasant winds, and to optimize the use of shade, breeze, and water. The planner’s objectives were achieved by adopting a compact urban form, developing special street and alley patterns, and designing houses with courtyards.\textsuperscript{440}

This clearly shows how extreme climate conditions influenced the design and spatial structure of the cities.

Therefore, the ‘irregularity’, ‘anarchy’, ‘irrationality’, ‘disorganised path’ and ‘negative effect of Islam’, which were discussed earlier in this thesis, are all assumptions made by colonialist and stereotyping Western scholars, and are empty of validity and credibility.

\textsuperscript{439} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{440} Kheirabadi, p. 20.
The compact urban form, with its residential density, narrow streets and alleyways, minimisation of space and uniformity of height of buildings, all reflect the awareness of Iranian planners of the physical conditions of their land. Additionally, this compact urban system was a perfect response to the social circumstances and offered many advantages to the city and its habitants.\footnote{Kheirabadi, p. 22.}

For instance, the narrow streets and labyrinthine alleyways of the traditional urban form of the city operate as channels for the circulation of air and heat exchange (Figure 10). Therefore, they play a crucial role in the climate of the city.\footnote{Kheirabadi, p. 23.} In contrast, in hot, arid cities open streets and straight, wide boulevards have the opposite effect. Hot, dusty winds and sandstorms blow through the streets during the day, and there are extremely cold winds during the night.\footnote{Ibid.} Perhaps another appropriate example would be the uniformity of height of the buildings. Other than some mosques and minarets, other traditional buildings exhibited uniformity of height throughout the entire city (Figure 11). This uniformity allowed the dusty wind to move freely above the city, so it would not be diverted downward into residential areas and other parts of the city.\footnote{Ibid.} Therefore, building high-rise tower blocks in an environment with extreme and frequent winds is a common decision that can cause problems when air is diverted downward between the buildings, which creates unwanted turbulence and noise.\footnote{Ibid.}
Figure 11. Typical traditional Iranian street, 'سبيلت های یزد' <https://www.eneshat.com/attractions-city/yazd/sabat> [accessed 17 June 2021].
The examples described above are intended to show that designers and planners of traditional Iranian cities had acute knowledge of their environmental conditions and the challenges they faced. However, as will be shown in further chapters and with the case study (Pardis Phase 11), Iranian cities’ contemporary design and urban planning have taken a contrary approach to shaping the physical environment. Modern Iranian urban planning and housing design are a replica of the Western urban model, with high-rise tower blocks. Later in this research, I will investigate how traditional Iranian urban planning and housing design came to be seen as a thing of the past and how traditional Iranian cities encountered Western modernity, concepts, ideologies and urban models.

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446 Kheirabadi, p. 20.
Remembrance of Things Past

This research project began with an interest in the sensory dimension of Tehran city life before moving on to a more specific study of Pardis Phase 11. The project consists of two parts; in the first I will sketch out a historical background of the city of Tehran, accompanied by my own sonic flânerie of research and investigation. This sonic flânerie is my sensorial encounter with architecture and urban design, in some ways tracing the history and fabric of the old city. In the second part, I have chosen a site-specific location (Pardis Phase 11) as the object of my multi-sensory research. With this sensorial approach, I intend to position myself and dissolve my subjectivity in relation to city, place and architecture. My stance is perhaps most eloquently articulated by the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa, who, in his seminal book The Eyes of the Skin, observes, ‘I experience myself in the city, and the city exists through my embodied experience. The city and my body supplement and define each other. I dwell in the city and the city dwells in me’. In parallel to this, Steen Eiler Rasmussen, the Danish architect and urban planner, in his invaluable book Experiencing Architecture, notes that:

Understanding architecture, therefore, is not the same as being able to determine the style of a building by some external features. It is not enough to see architecture; you must experience it. You must observe how it was designed for a special purpose and how it was attuned to the entire concept and rhythm of a specific era. You must dwell in the rooms, feel how they close about you, observe how you are naturally led from one to the other. You must be aware of the textual effects, discover why just those colours were used, how the choice depended on the orientation of the rooms in relation to windows and the sun.

In making this comment, Rasmussen urges us to understand architecture and urban design not solely in the domain of visual, geometry and

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447 Pallasmaa, The Eyes of the Skin, p. 43.

mathematical decision making. Nor as an isolated entity disconnected from the rest of society. Basically, Rasmussen and Pallasmaa are encouraging us to understand architecture in a broader context, including a multi-sensory approach. As can be seen in the passage quoted above, the materiality, hapticity, texture, weight, density of rooms, space and light become important elements. Furthermore, these elements structure a distinct experience of architectural space, in other words the everyday space as lived in by its inhabitants. The other prominent figure that ought to be mentioned here is the Finnish architect and designer Alvar Aalto. The multitude of sensory experience and elements noted above can also be seen in the architectural work and design of Aalto. According to Pallasmaa, ‘Alvar Aalto’s architecture is based on a full recognition of the embodied human condition and of the multitude of instinctual reactions hidden in the human unconscious’.449 This full recognition of the human condition in Aalto’s work exhibits his interest in agglomerations of multi-sensory experience. To put it succinctly, the encounter between the object of architecture and the user’s body is sensory perception as a whole rather than mere visual effect. Additionally, as Pallasmaa states,

Aalto’s architecture exhibits a muscular and haptic presence. It incorporates dislocations, skew confrontations, irregularities and polyrhythms in order to arouse bodily, muscular and haptic experiences. His elaborate surface textures and details, crafted for the hand, invite the sense of touch and create an atmosphere of intimacy and warmth. Instead of the disembodied Cartesian idealism of the architecture of the eye, Aalto’s architecture is based on sensory realism.450

I was fortunate to experience some of Aalto’s works and vision in Helsinki. For instance, the Graduate Centre and Amphitheatre is in Otaniemi in the district of Espoo in Helsinki, and was known as the Helsinki University of Technology (see image 1 below). At the end of 1940, after winning an architectural competition, Aalto was commissioned to design and create planning for the Otaniemi site as the Helsinki University of Technology. This building has been considered the prime landmark of Otaniemi. The auditorium building design and shape resonate with the ancient Greek

449 Pallasmaa, The Eyes of the Skin, p. 75.

450 Pallasmaa, The Eyes of the Skin, p. 76.
theatre style (see image 2 below). In my view, this shows Aalto’s acute awareness of and interest in past historical architectural monuments, and also the continuity between past and present. Before entering the main lobby, I went through the green space and the park, which is also known as Alvar’s square. The square plays the role of a courtyard garden, and provides a great space for gathering, playing games and taking outdoor breaks. In fact, the whole university is surrounded by green space. The use of greenery was at the heart of the university setting and planning. The use of red bricks with wooden window frames creates a harmonious combination with the trees and parks. This combination of architecture with nature is particularly revealing in the autumn.


At the main lobby of the undergraduate centre in Otakaari 1, the first two things that grabbed my attention were the light and the amount of space offered to users. This is indeed a spacious place paying attention to lots of small architectural details that encourage a pleasant mood within the building. For instance, the use of different materials such as wood, glass and concrete, and the combination of different colours like white, red, black and brown. To give a few examples of these little surprises, I should mention concrete columns that are partially covered by materials with a white bamboo shape and appearance, black stripes painted on the white floor, typical door and staircase handles, metal sides of the stairs that are also covered with wooden materials, and concrete walls that are covered with black bamboo material. These surprising elements create textural effects: contrasting effects of hardness and softness, light and heavy, taut and slack, and involve different colours, which all helps to create a multi-sensory experience of this place (see the images below).
Figure 15. www.archipicture.eu/Architekten/Finnland/Aalto%20Alvar/Alvar%20Aalto%20-%20Helsinki%20University%20of%20Technology%20Main%20Building%2041.html [accessed 22 September 2022].
Figure 16. www.archipicture.eu/Architekten/Finnland/Aalto%20Alvar/Alvar%20Aalto%20%
Helsinki%20University%20of%20Technology%20Main%20Building%2041.html > [accessed
22 September 2022].

Figure 17. www.archipicture.eu/Architekten/Finnland/Aalto%20Alvar/Alvar%20Aalto%2
0%Helsinki%20University%20of%20Technology%20Main%20Building%2041.html
> [accessed 22 September 2022].
The full recognition of the human condition in Aalto’s work reflects his interest in agglomerations of multi-sensory experience. To put it succinctly, the encounter between the object of architecture and the user’s body is a sensory perception as a whole rather than a mere visual effect. Moreover, as will be shown in this research, this recognition of the sensory aspects of design is what was ignored in the housing project of Pardis Phase 11. The thinking behind such an approach is to create a balance between object and subject, built form and living form. Additionally, as Pallasmaa states,

Aalto’s architecture exhibits a muscular and haptic presence. It incorporates dislocations, skew confrontations, irregularities and polyrhythms in order to arouse bodily, muscular and haptic experiences. His elaborate surface textures and details, crafted for the hand, invite the sense of touch and create an atmosphere of intimacy and warmth. Instead of the disembodied Cartesian
idealism of the architecture of the eye, Aalto’s architecture is based on sensory realism.\textsuperscript{452}

Ultimately, what is at stake here is the emphasis on the multitude of sensory experience, with the recognition of various elements such as touch, light, smell, taste, hearing and sound. To consider to these realms is to identify the importance of the psychological quality of architecture and urban design. As a result of such sensorial awakening, there have been numerous publications and projects where architects, urban planners and artists embrace sensory encounters within their practices. In 2005, curator Mirko Zardini held an exhibition at the Canadian Centre for Architecture entitled \textit{Sense of the City: Alternate Approach to Urbanism}. The exhibition was accompanied by a book of the same title, in which different sensorial encounters were taken up to study various cities and urban domains. In 2014, Matthew Gandy and B. J. Nilsen edited the book \textit{The Acoustic City}, a collection of essays accompanied by a CD. The book attempts a critical engagement with architecture, acoustic ecology and the study of the urban soundscape.

There have been other artistic research groups interested in urban sound environments and the relationship between architecture, sound and the city. For instance, \textit{Tuned City} is an ongoing artistic research group that started in 2008. \textit{Tuned City} describes itself as ‘artistic research and a festival trying to understand the city by the means of sound’.\textsuperscript{453} Carsten Stabenow, the artistic director of \textit{Tuned City}, writes that the project ‘is researching the relation between sound and space and presents artistic work and theoretical positions derived from critical preoccupations with sound in the context of urban and architectonic situations with particular emphasis on original approaches to the role of sound and listening’.\textsuperscript{454} Curator Carsten Seiffarth directed the project \textit{Bonn Hoeren} from 2010 to 2021 in Bonn, Germany. The project chooses and promotes a sound artist each year as part of their interest in sound art in public spaces and also the international discourse on the subject of sound art.\textsuperscript{455}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Pallasmaa, \textit{The Eyes of the Skin}, p. 76.
\item ‘Tuned City’ <https://www.tunedcity.net/?page_id=457> [accessed 10 August 2022].
\item Ibid.
\item ‘Bonn Hoeren’ <https://www.bonnhoeren.de/> [accessed 10 August 2022].
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the collective called Sonic Tehran, run by Noushin Laudan. Sonic Tehran is an interdisciplinary project exploring Tehran as a sound space. The project is located at the intersection of ethnomusicology, sound studies, and urban studies. At the heart of the project is an understanding of sound as an active agent in the production of urban space and an integral part of a rich, multi-sensory urban environment. The act of listening is understood as an intensely haptic and generative process by which sound can be experienced directly, remembered and imagined. Through personal memories, oral history interviews, sonic diaries, blog posts, sound walks and sound mapping, the project aims to document and explore Tehran’s rich sonic heritage.

Another recent publication on sound in urban studies that should be mentioned is Ziad Fahmy’s Street Sounds: Listening in Everyday Life in Modern Egypt (2020). In this book, Fahmy shows the importance of multi-sensory experience of life in Egypt. Fahmy uses sound and the politics of sound as one of the key tools for examining everyday life in Egypt. By using sound and listening, Fahmy attempts to reveal the transformation that took place in the first half of the twentieth century in Egyptian urban streets’ configuration. As he asserts, ‘we can get a lot closer to the embodied mundane realities of pedestrians, street peddlers, and commuters. This allows for a more micro-historical examination of everyday people’s interaction with each other’. At the core of Fahmy’s book is an interest in the historical examination of changing soundscapes to

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456 Noushin Laudan is Professor of Music at the City University of London and also an active researcher in the broad fields of popular music studies, contemporary music cultures and urban sound studies, with a focus on Iran and the Middle East.

457 https://www.sonictehran.com/

458 https://www.sonictehran.com/


460 Ibid.

461 Ibid, p. 3.
gain a better understanding of the wider cultural implications of Egyptian street life. All of these practices and studies emphasise the importance of critical attention and engagement with sensory perceptions, and can be understood as an attempt towards understanding city life, examining its past and reimagining its future. This multi-sensorial research, too, positions itself within the context explored above.

Mapping the History of Tehran

I have chosen Tehran as my study location for specific but at the same time interconnected reasons. First, it was once famous as the city of pomegranate, for its density of trees and fruit gardens. This was a place that looked like a woodland rather than a city; not a single building could be seen above the trees. Now, it is one of the largest cities in the world, with two revolutions and many more social upheavals in its past. Additionally, it has an eventful history that has gained international significance and attention for a variety of reasons. Among these important events are the Constitutional Revolution of Iran (Enghelab-e-Mashruteh), 1905–1911; the first World War II conference between the three major allies (the Soviet Union, the United States and the United Kingdom), also known as the Tehran Conference, in 1943; the establishment of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960, which turned Tehran into an important place influencing the price of and controlling oil production; the Islamic Revolution in 1979, which brought down the Pahlavi monarchy after 54 years, and followed eight years of war between Iran and Iraq. Additionally, at the time of writing (September 2022), as a result of the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini while in Iranian morality police custody, a women’s uprising is taking place in Tehran and many other cities of Iran. Despite all these historical events of international significance, Tehran is still little known and hidden from the outside world.

Tehran has been the capital of Iran for more than 200 years. The city has a different geological elevation in its various parts. For instance, in the south, where Tehran Railway Station (Rāḥ Āhan) is situated, the elevation above sea level is 1117 m (3665 ft), whereas the elevation in Tajrish Square in the north is 1712.6 m (5612.3 ft), and further north towards Velenjak the

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462 Gertrude Bell, Persian Pictures (London: Anthem Press, 2005).
elevation above sea level increases to 2000 m (6600 ft). In the north of Tehran is the magnificent mountain chain of Alborz, which is the barrier between the south coast of the Caspian Sea and the city.

In a historical sense, Tehran can be considered a new city and also an ancient village. ‘New’ in the sense that it was with the interest and by the decision of Agha Mohamad Shah and his successor, Fath Ali Shah, from the Qajar dynasty (1779–1925) that Tehran became the seat of government and the capital of Iran in March 1785. And secondly, it was during this time that rapid economic development and first urban transformation occurred in Tehran. Many Western diplomats, merchants, advisors, travellers and missionaries came to Tehran. It is within the above context of political, economic and cultural development that Tehran became an important new city in the modern history of Iran. However, I propose going back to its forgotten past and finding out more about the roots and origin of this city. As a researcher, I believe that it is in understanding the past that it becomes easier to explain the present and think about the future. This research partly gives an account of the city’s history, physical and social transformation. This will provide a context for closer and more detailed sensory research at a specific location (Pardis Phase 11) in Tehran.

It has been suggested that the name Tehran is identical with Tazora, which is near Rhages (Ray). The origin and etymology of the name cannot be exactly traced back and there is very little known about the history of the name Tehran. However, originally it was a small village located in the north of Ray. It is possible that it dates back to the 9th century CE, but for a few hundred years of its existence it was considered an insignificant town, and it owes its development to a large extent to the city of Ray. Many European travellers and geographers travelled to Iran and visited Tehran as

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463 https://www.britannica.com/place/Tehran


well as other cities. Perhaps the first to visit Tehran and Ray was Don Ruy González de Clavijo. Clavijo was the ambassador of Henry III of Castile to the court of the Timurid dynasty (1370–1507). By the time of his visit in 1404, he found only the ruins of Ray and Tehran was still unwalled.\textsuperscript{466}

Clavijo described the city as follows:

\begin{quote}
The city of Tehran was very large, but it had no walls; and it was a very delightful place, well supplied with everything; but it was an unhealthy place, according to the natives, and fevers were very unpleasant. The territory in which it stands is called Rie, which is a great and extensive lordship, possessed by the son-in-law of the lord.\textsuperscript{467}
\end{quote}

Figure 19. Streets of Tehran by Eugène Flandin, 1840, from Voyage en Perse, avec Flandin, ed. by Gide et Baudry, 1851.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Streets_of_Tehran_1_by_Eug%C3%A8ne_Flandin.jpg


\textsuperscript{467} Ruy González de Clavijo, Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo to the Court of Timour at Samarcand, A.D. 1403–6 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1859).
In the 1820s, Robert Ker Porter described the ruins of Ray and the migration of its residents, as follows:

> The ruins lie about five miles south-east of Tehran, extending from the foot of the curving mountains, and running in that direction across the plain in an oblique line south-west. The fabric of all, being chiefly of that burnt, and sun-dried material, which seems to bid defiance to the last oblivious touch of time.\(^{468}\)

It has also been suggested that the residents of Tehran used bricks from ruins in the construction of their own houses. In other words, Tehran was built on the ruins of Ray. The most important of these ruins is the citadel on a steep cliff called Burj (the tower).\(^{469}\) Regarding the construction of housing in Tehran, of the Muslim geographers and travellers who visited Ray and Tehran, only Yaghut in his book *Moajem Al-Balaban* and Ibn Zakariya Ghazvini in *Albalad* described people’s social behaviour and living conditions. George N. Curzon, in his book *Persia and The Persian Question*, relies on the same literature:

> The earliest irrefragable mention is in the pages of Abu Abdulah Yaghut in A.D 1179-80. His account, which is borne out by several native historians, represents the primitive Tehranis as troglodytes, living underground in a semi-savage state, at war with their neighbours, and in revolt against the sovereign.\(^{470}\)

Ghazvini explains that, because Tehranis were afraid of their enemies and government tax collectors, they built their houses underground, which made it difficult for others to enter. Additionally, Ghazi Emad-Aldin, in his


\(^{469}\) Barthold.

\(^{470}\) Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*. 
book *Ajaeb Albaladan*, mentioned Tehran as a village that was part of Ray district with many fruit gardens, and noted that its residents live in *Sardab* (basements). He further states that, because of the enclosed nature of these basements, it was extremely difficult to take the residents out of these basement houses.\(^{471}\) The first European who visited Rey and Tehran at this time was Don Ruy di Calvijo, a Spanish ambassador to Timmur. In 1404, he described the city as follows:

> The city of Tehran was very large, but it had no walls; and it was a very delightful place, well supplied with everything; but it was an unhealthy place, according to the natives, and fevers were very unpleasant.\(^{472}\)

Other Muslim Middle Eastern geographers and scholars had written on the subject of travelling through Middle Eastern cities: Al Istakhri, Al Masudi and Abu Abdulah Yaghut. Perhaps one of the most prominent names related to Tehran’s history is Abu Abdulah Mohamad ibn Hemad Tehrani, who was a religious scholar in the year 261 CE. The name of the city Tehran had not been mentioned in any historical records or books before that time, although it is much older.

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\(^{472}\) Calvijo, p. 98.
At this time, Tehran was a small, insignificant village and was part of other surrounding villages such as Waramin, Doulab and Mohamadiye, which were part of a larger district of Ray called Umm Al-Bellad and Sheykh Al-Bellad. However, Yaghut Hamavi, in his books Moajem Al-Adaba and Moajem Al-Baladan, described Tehran as a fruitful village that survived the Mongol invasion. Many villages that were part of the city of Ray had deteriorated during the Mongol invasion and never recovered. As a result, other villages flourished, of which Tehran was one. The other scholar is Samani, who in his book Al-Ansab suggests that the term Tehrani relates to people from Tehran. Abu Hemad Tehrani is also from there. Samani mentions that Hemad Tehrani was the only religious scholar who was sent to Tehran.

By the time of the Safavid dynasty (1501–1722), Tehran had a humble and insignificant role to play and never drew the attention of Safavid rulers. However, when Shah Tahmasb I came to power, he ordered a three-mile wall be built around the village with a bazaar. It Shah Tahmasb was the first king who favoured architectural activity in Tehran. According to one Muslim historian, Amin Ahmad Razi, in his book Tazkare Haft Ighlim, by the command of
the Shah, 114 towers and four gates were built as a tribute to the Quran, which consists of
114 chapters. The four gates were called:

1. Darvazeh Hazrat Abd-Alazim
2. Darvazeh Shemiranat
3. Darvazeh Ghazvin
4. Darvazeh Doulab

Figure 22. An old map of Tehran from the reign of Shah Tahmasb Safavi (16th century).

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473 Kalam and Ghazvini, pp.70–74.
During the Safavid dynasty, Tehran became a temporary place for royal court visits and residency. The Shah would visit the shrine of Hazrat Ab-Alazim in Ray and also go hunting in the mountains north of Tehran and Mehran. In the year 996, Abd-al Momen Khan Uzbak intended to invade Khorasan and Mashhad. At the time, Shah Abbas the Great was the ruler of the Safavid dynasty, and decided to come to Tehran with his army to face the invaders. The Shah stayed in Tehran for 51 days, and as result of an

\[^{474}\text{Ibid.}\]
excessive consumption of fruit became ill and stated that he would never visit Tehran again.

Figure 24. Drawing of Shah Abbas’s illness as a result of fruit consumption in Tehran.
With the rise of the Qajar dynasty, Tehran began its political and cultural life in the proper sense of the word in 1786. With Tehran becoming the capital, the stage was set for gradual modern urban transformation through the 19th century. The Qajar rulers portrayed their image in a religious manner: they claimed to be the guardians of Shi’ism and the Shi’i community, which was a legacy from the Safavid era. They also cherished the memory of ancient pre-Islamic Iran and showed their support of ancient celebrations, costumes and literature by naming their siblings after the heroes of the famous Iranian book *Shahnameh*. At this time, the southern and northern frontiers of Iran were in the hands of two European powers, Britain and Russia. As Mohammad A. Chachian, in his book *Town and Country in the Middle East*, reports:

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Iran’s economy and politics were increasingly influenced by two major factors: first; consolidation of British power in India and secondly; emergence of Russia as a competitive economic and political force in international affairs particularly related to Iran, Afghanistan and central Asia. In regard to Iran, Russia’s imminent threat to the interest of the British in the region forced the latter to change her regional policy in the early 19th century from promoting free trade to a more structured political and economic strategy with Iran.476

This was a time of increased import of goods from Europe and the export of items such as tobacco and opium.477 The industrial activities and trade at the time had an effect on the rise and death of Iranian cities, urban form, architecture and intellectual culture.

Many construction projects were commissioned: royal palaces, mosques, madrasas (educational institutions), caravansaries (roadside inns and places of rest for travellers) and many gardens.478 In fact, most construction projects took place during the reign of Fath Ali Shah and Naser al-din Shah. Qajar architecture extended the Safavid style; the features of Safavid style can be studied in the context of a specific city. This is because Safavid rulers chose different cities as their seat of government (e.g., Ardebil, Tabriz, Kerman, Kashan, Golpayegan, Mashhad, Qom and Isfahan) and the rate of architectural production in each city varied.479 However, the most standard architectural activities of the Safavid era can be found in Isfahan. Bridges, bazaars, dams, pigeon towers and caravanserais are some of the functional and dominant structures of this period. The common architectural language in all these structures is vaults, courtyards, arcades, pools, ayvans and small domes. There were varied floor plans such as octagonal, circular and the ubiquitous four ayvan.480 Qajar architecture used the same language but showed some major changes and innovations. For instance, the main characteristics are the exuberant use of colour and decoration. However, up


478 Amanat, p. 219.

479 https://iranicaonline.org/articles/architecture-vi

480 https://iranicaonline.org/articles/architecture-vi
until 1870 Tehran remained a humble city with few modifications. Most urban projects remained unfinished—for example, Kakh e Golestan (Golestan Palace) was finished during Shah Naser al-din’s rule (1848–1896), which came to be known as the Naseri era. Tehran suddenly went through a major transformation at this time. Chaichian identifies this transformation process as the first stage of Iranian society’s incorporation into the world capitalist economy.\footnote{Chiachian, 2009, p. 2.} However, the degree of this incorporation was influenced by internal social forces such as state struggle and conflict with tribal upheavals in different areas of the country and Ulama’s discontent with the court. Although it took the Shah almost 20 years to become conscious of his capital environments, this was largely as a result of his travels in Europe around 1873. As Curzon reminds us:

> Tehran was suddenly bidden to burst its bonds and enlarge its quarters. The old walls and towers were, for the most part, pulled down, the ditch was filled up, a large slice of surrounding plain was taken in, and at the distance of a full mile from the old enclosure, a new rampart was constructed upon Vauban’s system, copied from the fortification of Paris before the German war.\footnote{Curzon, \emph{Curzon’s Persia}, pp. 89–90.}  

It can be observed from Curzon’s account that the new planning was influenced by European design models. The Shah’s 1873 tour was the first time that an Iranian ruler left the country for a royal tour of European countries. From the Caspian port of Astrakhan, the Shah visited Moscow, St Petersburg, Prussia, the Rhine Valley, Belgium, Britain (mostly London and Manchester), France, Switzerland, Italy and Austria. The Shah’s observations did not change his views on transforming Iran’s political order or building a modern democratic parliament.\footnote{Amanat, pp. 279–80.} During these trips, European material culture fascinated the Shah and his fellow travellers. For instance, many urban spaces, royal gardens, palaces and public buildings that were built in Iran after his journey were
influenced by European styles. This was the first time that European-style architecture and planning were combined with Persian craftsmanship. This is evident in a few remaining palaces, houses, gardens, bath houses and bazaars.

For example, the Golestan Palace in Tehran is the most significant court architecture of the Qajar era that was inspired by the Hermitage in St Petersburg. The Mirror Hall in the palace, which is also known as Talar-e Ayeneh, is obviously inspired by Versailles Palace in France. Another landmark of the Naseri age was the state hall or Takkiyeh e Dowlat, which was designed for religious ceremonies of Muharram. The building were influenced by European opera houses. The Shah was influenced in its design by his French teacher, Jules Richard. Qajar architecture borrowed the European style and was influenced massively by modern construction of architecture. But it should also be mentioned that this interest was accompanied by the preservation of Iranian characteristics and functionality, which came to be known as Perso-European style.

Figure 26. Golestan Palace, view from the garden. https://www.ghoghnos.net/blog/attractions/golestan.

484 Amanat, p. 280.
Figure 27. Talar Ayeeneh / Mirror Hall in Golestan Palace
Most of the modern urban fabric of central Tehran goes back to the first Pahlavi era by Reza Shah (1925–1941). It is during this time that large-scale urban transformation was changing the layout of the city. The first phase of urban transformation during the Nasseri era in the 1860s and 1870s was to create new walls and small changes; the second phase in 1925–1941 involved imposing new layouts, changing street patterns, the construction of new arrangements and expansion beyond the boundaries of the old traditional city. Additionally, in December 1931 the Ministry of the Interior sent instructions to planners, architects and people who were involved in the urban transformation and modernisation of the old city. The guidelines were full of details regarding the size of streets, sidewalks, gutters, squares, shops and materials used. It was noted that Tehran, ‘an

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oriental city without good communications and with but few amenities[,] was being radically re-planned and re-built’.\(^{487}\) This large-scale urban transformation in the city was, in the eyes of L.P. Elwell-Sutton, in his book *Modern Iran*, ‘quite ruthless’.\(^{488}\) Numerous old buildings, as well as 12 gates of the city, were destroyed, and the routes of the walls and moats were used for the construction of new boulevards.\(^{489}\) The demolition of the gates and old urban fabric has also been seen as a symbolic act of negation and rejection of the past. As Grigor contends:

They were seen neither as ‘historic’ nor ‘monumental’, but rather as standing tributes to Qajar power. ... Their demolition both enabled the physical expansion of the urban fabric and the eradication of the last traces of the ancient regime from the capital.\(^ {490}\)

The dominant idea was that the traditional urban fabric had no logic and was nothing other than chaotic. This is reflected in reports and diaries from the time: the process of demolition and destruction of the traditional urban fabric was taking place very quickly and in a brutal manner. In many cases, owners’ right to their property was ignored, and as many as 10,000 houses were demolished.\(^ {491}\) From 1937 onwards, Tehran was no longer known for its trees and fruit; it was turned into an open space for rapid development and expansion in every possible direction.

All the residential areas known as محله (or districts) in a large quarter of an old town like Sangeladj, which was also known as an anti-establishment

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489 Madanipour, *Tehran*.


district, and neighbouring the citadel from the west, were destroyed to make space for building the stock exchange and related economic institutions designed by the American planner and designer Leon Barton. However, this project was cancelled due to the start of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{492} Other urban plans were suggested for this area, and eventually, according to the decision of the parliament, it turned into the central park of the city known as پارک شهر. It was also during the reign of Reza Shah that the city’s transportation network was established. It has been suggested that the aim of this transportation network was: firstly, to make military movement easier within the city in order to support the government more effectively; and also to change the way goods and capital circulated in the city.\textsuperscript{493} The imposing of a new street and transportation system on the old urban fabric was intended to make a modern city. The ‘plan was obviously inspired by the modern architecture and urbanism movement and imposed a gridiron pattern onto the city’.\textsuperscript{494} All these activities, and the attitude of belittlement towards cultural identity and history, suggested the rise of ‘pseudo modernism’ and ‘Europeanism’, as implemented in the infrastructure of many large Iranian cities.

\textsuperscript{492} Madanipour, Tehran.

\textsuperscript{493} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{494} S. M. Habibi, From City to City (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 2006).
Figure 29. The Plan of New Avenues during Reza Shah.
Figure 30. The Plan of Tehran in 1953, before the Master Plan extension.  
As Katouzian explains:

The rise of supremacy of official, as well as unofficial, pseudo modernism in Iran was based on, first, an uncritical rejection of all existing Iranian traditions, institutions, values, and so on, as ‘backward’ and a source of national humiliation, and secondly, a superficial zest, an emotional fever, for the imitation and emulation of all things European within the narrow confines of a small, but increasing, group in the urban community.\(^{495}\)

It can be seen that underlying ideas for urban change and development were mostly adaptations of European cultural material. However, this interest in ‘pseudo modernism’ continued to the second era of Pahlavi (1941–1978). The successor of Reza Shah was his son, Mohamad Reza Shah, who carried out his father’s plan regarding the modernisation process. Reza Shah’s dream of building a massive state structure was fulfilled by his son as a result of rising oil revenues and increased oil production.\(^{496}\) The rapid process of modernisation and extensive program of urban development widened the gap between the rich and poor. For instance, the standard of living for many families improved as they had accessibility to modern apartments, medical insurance, unemployment insurance and other consumer goods.\(^{497}\) But, at the same time, ‘it was obvious that the quality of life for many families deteriorated as the shanty towns proliferated’.\(^{498}\) The percentage of families living in only one room increased from 36% to 43% between 1967 and 1977, and 42% of the population in Tehran suffered from inadequate housing.\(^{499}\) This created a situation where there was imbalance between socioeconomic, political and urban development. Thus the period


\(^{496}\) Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*.

\(^{497}\) Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*.

\(^{498}\) Abrahamian, p. 447.

\(^{499}\) Ibid.
1963–1977 was an era of the development of socioeconomic activities but an underdeveloped political structure, which created imbalance in the economy, politics and urban sphere. To control this situation and provide an acceptable justification for ideas of development, progress and modernisation, and to implement them into the structure of the city, the government needed a master plan. The first Master Plan for Tehran, prepared by a consortium that included Aziz Farmanfarmaian, a prominent Iranian architect, and Victor Gruen Associates of the United States under the direction of Fereydun Ghaffari, an Iranian planner, was approved in 1968. The master plan proposed the making of a linear city, aligned with Western urban planning and consisting of 10 different zones, each accommodating 500,000 residents. The plan proposed for Tehran was highly influenced by the British new towns movement as in Milton Keynes and Redditch. Victor Gruen, in his book *The Heart of Our Cities*, envisaged that the metropolis of the future would be made up of a central city surrounded by 10 cities, each with their own centre. What Gruen proposed for Tehran was also a version of his linear concept of the city. One aspect of linear design that the Tehran Master Plan shared with new towns such as Redditch was the importance of transport as the spine of the city.

Rosemary Wakeman, in her book *Practicing Utopia*, describes the master plan of Tehran as ‘an all-out American-style modernization of Iran and the exporting of utopian urban visions directly to Tehran’. The master plan of Tehran is a good example of structural conflict between internal local logic and an external rational concept of development, which I addressed extensively in the chapter on Urban Form and Architecture. Farmanfarmaian also acknowledges this structural conflict by noting that the scientific method and modern approach employed in the master plan of

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500 Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*.


502 Ibid.

503 Madanipour, *Tehran*.

504 Ibid.

*Tehran* were not fitting to the reality on the ground, and there was no concern shown for the traditional urban pattern of the city and the inhabitants’ lifestyle.\textsuperscript{506} However, in addition to social and political problems, the master plan proved to be unrealistic and, with the advent of the Islamic revolution in 1979, it never materialised.

The post-revolutionary era was not marked by a smooth transition between the monarchical system of government and the Islamic Republic. Two years after the revolution, in 1980, the Iran–Iraq war started, which lasted eight years before the countries signed a peace treaty in 1988. Consequently, during these turbulent years there was interruption of any major urban development plans. However, illegal and informal construction continued during this period, which was referred to as ‘revolutionary housing’.\textsuperscript{507} After the war came a period of transition from revolution to normalisation, where the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development ordered a review and implementation of Tehran’s master plan.\textsuperscript{508} However, Tehran’s municipality decided to change their policy and introduced a new urban plan called Tehran 1380 (1996). This was a five-year joint plan (1996–2001) between Tehran municipality and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, which was later extended by another 25 years.\textsuperscript{509} Although the name of the plan was changed, in principle the intention was the same as the original master plan of Tehran in 1968. ‘The Government realised the urgency of revising the old master plan’.\textsuperscript{510} At the heart of the plan was the construction of necessary infrastructure such as highways, subways, transportation and a modern sewage system.\textsuperscript{511} Furthermore, the urban

\textsuperscript{506} Aziz Farmanfarmaian, Interview with *Shahrnegar* Magazine, 2006.

\textsuperscript{507} Habibi and Hourcade.

\textsuperscript{508} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{509} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{510} Shirazi.

\textsuperscript{511} Ibid.
management of Tehran after the revolution in 1979 proposed Islamic urbanism, whose aim was to make a ‘city with Iranian-Islamic identity and authenticity, a city which is well prepared for the prosperity and sublimity of humankind and pure life’. However, this proved to be a utopian vision that remained limited to a general statement; the plan had no clear practical guidelines or suggestions as to how this could be achieved. As Shirazi remarks:

Although a number of organizations and academic institutions have been commissioned to set criteria for Islamic urban planning and design and to develop regulations for the realization of an Islamic city, no significant advances have been introduced, and there is no promise of any remarkable changes taking place in the future. At the same time, some cities have established new initiatives seeking to contribute to the official call for an Islamic city, like the Permanent Secretariat of the Islamic City in Isfahan, which tries to formulate the principles of an Islamic City. Organizing international and national conferences and symposiums on the Islamic City is nowadays very popular and frequent: for example, the First World assembly of Islamic Cities in 2013, Qazvin, the aim of which was to produce an Act for Islamic Cities, that would include principles for defining and identifying Islamic urbanity.

This shows that the call for an Islamic city and urbanism raised by the post-revolutionary government remained a theoretical discourse; at a practical level, the language of urban development and design was strongly modernist. This included the construction of sprawling high-ways, high-rise buildings, massive mega-shopping malls and other modern amenities. The Pardis Phase 11 housing project discussed in this research is a prime example of a contemporary state-led mega urban project that follows a global style of production of space.

As shown in this chapter, the predominant theme in the history of Tehran has been that of fundamental destruction and creation: from the garden of pomegranates to building the city walls in 1553 to the first major attempt to reshape the city in 1860–1870; and the demolition of the old walls in 1868 during the Qajar period. The building of the walls in 1553 and the first

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513 Shirazi.

514 Ibid, pp. 169–73.
major urban modifications and urban development during the 1870s were at least attempts to have respect for the old traditional urban fabric. The interest in modernising the city was an attempt to complement these older elements.\(^{515}\)

Under Reza Shah, the Haussmannisation of the city on a large scale began, with enlargement by introducing wide streets and boulevards. From the 1930s onwards, Tehran turned into an open area on all sides. The main transformation of the city was based on a planning framework influenced by Western ideas of planning. As Madanipour notes, ‘the transformation of Tehran in the last century has occurred largely by importing and using the images of the West, it aimed to recreate itself in the image of the West’.\(^{516}\) From the beginning, Paris and Baron Haussman’s model of planning played an influential role in the urban fabric of Tehran. There has also been borrowing and adaptation of ideas from other Western countries such as Germany, Britain and the United States.\(^{517}\)

\(^{515}\) Madanipour, Tehran.

\(^{516}\) Ibid, p. 217.

\(^{517}\) Ibid.
As part of my multi-sensorial research, I took several sonic walks around the Golestan Palace and various locations in old parts of the city dating back to the Qajar period. Additionally, I extended the walks to central areas of Tehran, where most of the urban fabric goes back to Pahlavi’s plan for further modern urban planning. The recordings presented in this research are the sonic experience of these places today, while I was reflecting on the past, present and future of the place. I intended to recover a sense of place, which can refer to felt qualities and the search for the distinctive character of the area. In other words, this was an attempt to make a connection to the past both cognitively and through temporal and spatial experience.
Sonic flânerie in the old part of the city. Tehran’s Grand Bazaar is a historical site. The place consists of different corridors, and each section deals with specific goods, such as jewellery, carpet, tea, spices, etc. Enghelab Square (revolution Square) to Ferdowsi Square is a significant street and an interesting walk, as the University of Tehran is located in between the two squares. The significance of the area is partly due to the uprising of students and demonstrations during the Islamic Revolution back in 1979. The square used to be called Shah Reza Square and Avenue, named after Reza Shah, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty. Another significant factor that has been associated with Enghelab Square and Avenue is that it connects the west of the city to the east. From the south side of the square, it goes all the way down to Azadi Tower (Shahyad) in the south of the city. Moreover, this was one of the earliest major urban cuts, which involved imposing new urban layouts on traditional city streets.

This is an area full of life and history, the hustle and bustle of everyday life in the Bazaar. While walking up and down the grand boulevards, streets and narrow alleyways, I was thinking about the city’s old gates, walls, old routes, moats and all the garden fruits. Perhaps I was walking alongside the city walls, or perhaps where they used to be; perhaps I was right in the middle of a pomegranate garden or cherry orchard. I might have been standing in the shade of an Old World sycamore tree and listening to the birds singing, dogs barking and children running after each other. Suddenly, a motorbike’s loud horn with the rider shouting ‘HEY, MISTER, BE CAREFUL!’ woke me up to the present life of the city, the barbecued potatoes and boiled eggs with tomatoes being sold on the corner combining with the smell of cars and motorbike exhaust. I was listening to the guy calling people to buy tea, ‘HEY, TEA, TEA, COME ON HAVE IRANIAN TEA!’ The street vendor was shouting ‘EVERYTHING MUST GO, HURRY UP, TODAY ONLY!’ The customers haggling with the seller, two passersby deeply puffing cigarettes and talking about the daily shocking inflation on goods. I smelled the strong odour of their cigarettes as my eyes followed the floating smoke in the air. A guy on the side of the street, his large speaker playing 1950s and 1960s Iranian music shouted: ‘OLD AND NEW, MUSIC, MUSIC, ON CD AND MP3’. This is an area with some traces of the ancient past, surrounded and transformed by modern arrangements of life. All in all, this was a rich and positive experience, giving me a sense of belonging to the place, remembering the past life and history of the city.
Location: Enghelab Square, Ferdowsi Square, Cheragh Bargh, and Grand Bazaar

Duration: 05:17, 24:09, 6:07

Audio channels: Mono

Time of recording: 13:35 p.m.

Time of walking: 13:00-17:00

Device: Zoom H2N

Sample rate: 48 kHz


519 https://soundcloud.com/sonicdiarytehran/acoutemological-walks-grand-bazaar-cheragh-bargh

520 https://soundcloud.com/sonicdiarytehran/acoustemological-walks-grand-bazaar-cheragh-bargh/2
Sonic flânerie in Narmak and Haft Houz (Seven Ponds). This neighbourhood is known for having 100 city little squares or ميكان that are known to locals by a number. Narmak was constructed on an area of 507 hectares. This was a project aiming to accommodate 25,000 residents. Most houses in Narmak are located around the edges of squares, so the urban structure of Narmak is a repetition of this arrangement. The original plan of the houses was low-rise and, in some cases, two-story apartments with a courtyard. But these days not many of those original houses exist, as they have been transformed into mid-rise and high-rise apartments. By walking, wandering and analysing the Narmak area, I noticed disharmony in height and urban development. My most interesting walk in Narmak was around Haft Houz Square or Seven Ponds. There are a lot of shops around the square and usually it is a crowded place, packed with people of every age: a lot of children with their parents, lovers hand in hand, teenagers and elderly people. The seven ponds are located in the middle of the square, with a green area, tall trees, shrubs, benches and chess tables providing a gathering place. A variety of shops such as jewellery, clothing, food, juice bars, bakery, sandwich bars and many more also attract shoppers from other neighbouring areas. If one desires to have a multi-sensory experience, Haft Houz is definitely a place that won't disappoint. In front of some clothing shops, usually someone is standing and calling for people to visit their shop. Saying: ‘LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, SALE, SALE, COME ON IN, COME ON IN, NO ONE CAN BEAT OUR PRICES IN TEHRAN! EVERYTHING MUST GO, HURRY UP, MOST FASHIONABLE ITEMS YOU CAN FIND!’ (The Farsi version is in green below). The smell of steamed corn with butter, steamed red beetroot and steamed broad beans is in the air. Difficult to ignore and hard not to buy a cup to taste when walking past these street sellers of snacks.
بدو،بدو، خانمها، آقایان، حراج، حراج

آتش زدم به مالم، بهترین اجناس در تهران.

عجله کنید، بهترین اجناس روز
Location: Resalat Square - Helal Ahmar Square - Haft Howz

Duration: 8:29
Audio Channel: Mono
Time of recording: 10:35
Time of walking: 10:00-13:45
Device: Zoom H2N
Sample rate: 48 khz

https://soundcloud.com/sonicdiarytehran/acoustemological-walks-resalat-sq
Sonic flânerie in Tajrish, one of the oldest areas of Tehran, which is part of Shemiranat county. Historically, Tajrish used to be a small village that later was absorbed into the urban fabric of the city. There are two important areas in Tajrish: the mausoleum of Imam Zadeh Saleh and Tajrish Bazaar. According to local people, the Square is one of the busiest parts of the city. The bazaar, mausoleum, bus terminal and taxi station all contribute to the traffic and atmosphere of the place. The recording and walking took place in two parts—one in 2019 and the second in 2022— which have merged into one another.
Location: Tajrish Sq
Duration: 32:32
Audio channels: Ster
Time of recording and walking, 1: 14:00-16:40
Time of recording and walking, 2: 10:30-13:10
Device: Zoom H2N
Sample rate: 48 kHz

The city in its complete sense, then, is a geographical plexus, an economic organisation, an institution process, a theatre of social action, and an aesthetic symbol of collective unity.\textsuperscript{523}

It is only when we turn to consider our practical experience as agents, and not our theoretical experience as thinkers, that we discover the true nature of reason.\textsuperscript{524}

\textit{Pardis Phase 11} is being built on a 3,953,449 m\textsuperscript{2} plot of land that will house 37,000 apartments and public infrastructure. \textit{Pardis} is nearly 50 kilometres outside of Tehran and is part of a government social housing project called \textit{Maskan-e Mehr} (social housing). This was a government plan to provide free land to developers in order for them to build affordable housing for first-time buyers.\textsuperscript{525} The project, which was signed off on by Iran’s Ministry of Road and Urbanisation during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s presidency in 2009, has been described as the world’s largest social housing project. \textit{Pardis Phase 11}, as

\textsuperscript{523} Lewis Mumford, \textit{The Culture of Cities} (New York: Open Road, 1970).

\textsuperscript{524} John MacMurray, \textit{The Self as Agent} (London: Faber & Faber, 1957).

the name may indicate, is part of a larger suburban housing project called *Pardis City* in *Pardis County*, on the northeast side of Tehran. It started with *Pardis Phase 1* and is currently coming up to *Phase 11*.

My initial idea was to study Phases 7–11. While the idea of sensorial investigation into these different phases might be interesting and attractive in theory, after visiting the area I realised the enormity of the task due to the complexity surrounding each phase. Therefore, it became clear to me that the focus should be on only one of the phases.

![Figure 32](image_url)

*Figure 32. Google maps image of the whole of Pardis City and the different phases. Phase 11 is in the left top corner.*

Other than the enormity of the *Pardis* suburban housing project, the other thing that attracted my attention was the name chosen for the site. The contrast between the meaning of the word *Pardis* and the reality of the environment and
atmosphere of housing in *Pardis Phase 11* became an interesting element for me. The word ’پردیس’ 'Pardis' is Persian in origin and means ‘paradise’. The word paradise evolved gradually from various etymological roots. It came into English from the French *paradis*, derived from the Latin *paradisus*, which is derived from Greek *parádeisos*. This term derives from the Proto-Iranian *paradaïjah*, 'walled enclosure'. By the fifth and sixth centuries, this word was known in Assyrian as *pardesu*, or ‘domain’. As a result, by the time of the first Persian Empire, the term had come to refer to walled gardens.

The concept of paradise is frequently associated with religious contexts. Every religion views paradise as a promised land full of goodness and happiness. For instance, in Christianity, and specifically in the New Testament, it refers to ‘the Christian heaven, a place where the souls of the righteous departed await resurrection’. In Islam, it also refers to the Muslim Heaven, known as *Jannat or Behesht* in Persian, which is a place of extreme beauty and bliss where one can find prosperity, and life continues after death with exceptional happiness. There is only peace and prosperity in paradise. This ancient word in the Iranian culture means *غایب* garden, *سودرس* Firdaus, *بهشت* Behesht, and heavenly, and should include fountains, pools and trees. It is quite ironic, then, to name a housing construction site بِهشت paradise, as *Pardis Phase 11* has done, even though it is in the middle of desolate desert-like land with no sign of a blade of green grass.

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526 ‘Paradise’, *Online Etymology Dictionary* [https://www.etymonline.com/word/paradise] [accessed 2 May 2021]

527 Ibid.
Figure 33. Persian Paradise Garden, painting from Mughal Empire, c. 1590.

Figure 34. Pardis Phase 11 housing construction. Photo by Saeed Moosavi, 2021.
Additionally, there is a semantic contradiction between the name and the design of *Pardis Phase 11* housing project. As mentioned above, the name and idea of Pardis or Paradise is linked with happiness, a place of beauty or dreamland. This suburban housing area is detached from its name; it seems that developers used the name as a marketing tool to sell a dream and a false nostalgia for the past.

The most common name for this global style of suburban development is linked with nature. For Dovey, ‘these names evoke a place with a view of the natural landscape (Parkview) or are associated with water (Meadowbrook), trees (Laurel) or flowers (Primrose). The dream of suburbia is an escape from the city to a life enveloped in nature’. What this implies is that the developers and designers of suburban areas are using different themes to create an imaginary exotic home.

![Figure 35. Pardis Phase 11 housing construction. Photo by Saeed Moosavi, 2021.](image)

Furthermore, the research project in its totality deals with the effect of the social and spatial organisation of everyday experience of life within the built environment. How does one experience the living environment in terms of the senses? And how are our senses affected by giving shape and form to our material world? The case study is essentially an inquiry into human

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Dovey.
relationships with place through listening. P, placing myself in a specific location, landscape and culture to deepen my understanding of the place. It is crucial to know how the built environment and housing architecture can be understood through sensory experience. I am drawn to the ways in which our senses can play an important role in raising political issues.

My project employs multi-sensory methodologies through a collection of media content in the form of field recordings, photography, collage, and video recordings that were captured at a specific location in the east of Tehran: Pardis Phase 11. For the field recordings in this project, I chose an acoustemological approach to engage with sound as a way of knowing and experiencing everyday life through forms. Acoustemology is the combination of two words, acoustic and epistemology, and refers to the attempt to create a sonic experience as a means of knowing. Steven Feld coined the term in 1992. Feld’s research and observations among one of New Guinea’s tribes, the Kaluli of Papua led him to realise that sound was ‘central to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth’. For instance, the sounds of forest among the Kaluli tribe had a strong relationship with the notion of place. Feld used acoustemology as a tool for studying and describing the collection of his hearing, listening and sound to understand the Kaluli culture of Papua.

I believe that this acoustic form of knowledge can be applied in different cultural and historical contexts. My interest in acoustemology stems from its interdisciplinary potential as an analytical tool for studying urban sonic experience in the context of urban architecture. Therefore, I plan to create a discursive sensory environment in order to generate a contemplative and in-depth reflection of the land transformed into an urban setting. This work investigates the urban transformation caused by the forces of ‘global architectural culture’, ‘de-localisation’, ‘progress’ and ‘development’.

This is accomplished by documenting and exploring the specific location, with a focus on the materiality and visibility of architecture. This project has been

inspired by the physical, spatial and symbolic elements in the visualisation of housing architecture in *Pardis Phase 11*. I intended to become an acute observer of the location, to develop a critical reflection on the transformation and processes of land into a suburban housing district.

*We cannot close our ears…*

*We cannot help but hearing.*

*All the sounds.*
Figure 36. Drone photograph of the Pardis Phase 11 construction site. Photo taken by Amin Mohammadi, 2020.
Location: Pardis Phase 11

Duration: 2:18

Audio channel: Stereo

Time of recording: 11:00 A.M.

Device: Zoom

Sample rate: 44.1 KHZ

Figure 37. Drone photograph of the Pardis Phase 11 construction site. Photo by Amin Mohammadi, 2020.
Moreover, as an artist–researcher I hoped to have an acute acoustic sensitivity to my environment. Consequently, this sensitivity to sound and listening produces the condition of the possibility for knowing. This deliberate effort is part of acoustemology, which, as Feld observed, is ‘to argue the potential of acoustic knowing, of sounding as a condition of and for knowing, of sonic presence and awareness as potent shaping forces in how people make sense of

experiences.\textsuperscript{532} It should be noted that recorded sound is not the only important factor. Focusing solely on sound recording is insufficient for providing an intimate connection to a location and its inhabitants' experiences. As a result, the listening process is just as important as the recorded sounds. They are both attempts to recreate a sense of 'place experience' as well as the possibility of encountering other realities. According to Rice, 'acoustemology points to the existence of alternative ways of encountering the world and possibility of hearing other realities'.\textsuperscript{533}

\textsuperscript{532} Rice.

\textsuperscript{533} Ibid.
Now I will do nothing but listen.
I hear all sounds running together, combined,
fused or following,
Sounds of the city and sounds out of the city, sounds
Of the day and night...\textsuperscript{534}

The possibility of sensorial openness through the ears and auditory cortex involves the parts of the mind that make sense of and give meaning to what it has perceived. Soundscape, field recordings and listening, like other forms of experiencing a place, are the outcome of a particular intention. Although the emphasis might seem to be solely on the importance of sonic knowing, acoustemological investigation is an interplay between sonic knowledge and hearing, i.e., listening. As an effort to listen and give materiality and forms to a formless sound wave, as Steven Connor explains, ‘a soundscape must be pulled out, foregrounded from a previously formless condition, or rather something

\textsuperscript{534}Walt Whitman, Song of Myself (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2018).
that is not in any kind of condition, formed or formless, at all’. From my understanding, what Connor is implying here is that the preoccupation with sound and data evaluation in itself is not enough to constitute a soundscape, but it is essential to be sensitive to sonic ways of knowing, which are shaped by environment. In other words, it is the relation between sound and the act of active listening that makes a new form. It is this attentive act of listening and the possibility of the human ear to hear and listen that I am most interested in.

Although there is a difference in meaning between hearing and listening, these two sensory capabilities are often used interchangeably. I differentiate between listening and hearing as Paulina Oliveros does in her book Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice: physically, hearing means to receive vibrations and waveforms that are within the range of the human ear involuntarily, whereas listening is thoughtful attention voluntarily given to sound. To hear ‘is the physical means that enables perception. To listen is to give attention to what is perceived both acoustically and psychologically’. Accordingly, deliberate effort and eagerness are needed to encounter the phenomena of sound, to tune one’s ear with intention and attention. Furthermore, it is this encounter with other realities through life and human built environments in sound and listening that has piqued my interest in acoustemology and informs my case study.

In those days men’s ears heard sounds
Whose angelic purity cannot be conjured
Up again by any amount of science or magic.


536 Pauline Oliveros, Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2005).

In this context, my case study investigates the sonic experience of *Pardis Phase 11*, with the goal of using ‘reflective judgement’ and our epistemological capacity as a critical component in developing our ability to affiliate our faculties of sensibility, understanding and reason in everyday life. In other words, to explore and study urban phenomena using the aesthetic capability, i.e., the unity of the three faculties mentioned above. This is made possible by opening and engaging sensorial elements via methodological components that become an important part of the mind’s cognitive capacity.

By staying close to sound and the act of listening, I hoped to create a narrative about the transformation of life and the living environment by using and working with an acoustical framework. The result of the sensual experience generated by artistic research and intervention allows for the creation of new forms. This would enable perceivers to see the world as it is or perhaps as it ought to be. The questions and concerns about how ‘it is’ and ‘it ought to be’ would lay the groundwork for political awareness. Furthermore, it can be used as a starting point to understand how policy makers’ decisions can influence different types of shared environments and living spaces. For instance, under a particular urban and housing policy, a location is allocated for a new suburban area. The location, planning model and architecture design are all part of a decision package that will create an infrastructure, which will provide a living environment for the people using it. This can be seen as the first encounter between inhabitants and users with an environment that has been produced and structured under a particular policy. What is at stake here is the relationship between organising social systems in the form of structures and inhabitants of created structures. In other words, the relationship between agency and structure. Agency as having rational and sensual capacity to shape, change and give meaning to the environment. On the other hand, structures are frameworks and conditions of possibility within which the agent’s potential can be

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actualised.539 From this point of view, built form and urban design can be considered as a form of structure that allows and promotes certain forms of life and sanctions others.540 Additionally, a particular form of structure is created by people who are more powerful than others. This follows the discussion of power and espouses a certain political outlook, which affects our existing spatial configuration positively and negatively.

Moreover, the encounter between inhabitants and the built environment will determine the sensory experience of inhabitants of any given area. Urban design and development should not be seen only as a technical and physical process (engineering design, measurement and construction of roads, providing electricity), but as a social one.541 To reiterate, physical/technical processes are not more important than social/spatial processes. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of all agents, such as municipalities, urban planners, policy makers, urban designers, architects and artists, to consider the social aspects of the built environment. All these parties should collaborate and participate in different stages of urban development and urban renewal. In other words, urban design should be seen as a socio-spatial process with other factors such as political, economic and cultural processes involved.542 As the anthropologist Steven Feld puts it, ‘as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place’.543

In parallel to this relationship between sensory experience and the urban environment, I intended to stay in one location and observe the passing of hours, minutes and seconds, to see the changing light of the place, to smell and to listen. The act of listening is critical to this project because it is a preliminary

539 Dovey.

540 Ibid.

541 Madanipour, Design of Urban Space.

542 Ibid.

auditory investigation of the location. For me, the act of listening and recording is a unique way of engaging with a location and its distinct character. It forces me to focus on my surroundings and become a keen observer to comprehend the physical world. As a result, listening and sound have essentially evolved into a novel way of interacting with our built environment. In other words, it is reading and studying everyday life and reality to develop auditory forms of knowledge. As an artist/urban researcher, I see the city as a quintessential example of human history in the making, future life imagination and social justice ideas.

Sound, sound, only sound,
The sound of the limpid wishes
Of water to flow,
The sound of the falling of star light
On the wall of earth’s femininity
The sound of the bunding meaning’s sperm
And the expansion of the shared mind of love. Sound, sound, sound, Only sound remains.544

The use of acoustemology as an important tool has been critical in this case study. As a result of the sound recording process in Pardis, developing a relationship with the location became possible. Through listening, a physical encounter with the empty concrete tower blocks, with dogs wandering around the construction site, was achieved. In Pardis Phase 11, I consider my recordings to be an artistic intervention aimed at creating an archive of the history of listening. The recordings are a representation of my interaction with the locations and their particularities such as the materiality, the physical aspect that surrounded me, the size and the dimensions of the landscape features. Furthermore, the recordings are essentially my way of interacting with places as an artist and urban researcher, of exploring the sonic reality of those places.

The sound of the day is loud
But the world is short.545


545 Mohamad Mokhtari, ‘Maybe the Last Love’. 
The recordings featured in this project were made during a 15-day visit to *Pardis Phase 11* (April 2022). I chose some of them to represent the experience and feeling of that location, to identify the specific locality of sound and its rhythms. They remind me of being there and listening to people's everyday sonic experiences. The recordings are not of what was heard but rather of what was listened to, which I believe produces another set of meanings and sonic experience in the listener's perception. In other words, I invite the listener to become an active listener; to generate his or her own interpretation. To convey reality and a sense of place, none of these recordings have been edited, nor have any special audio effects been added. As a result, the recordings are taken directly from a reality that was part of my own listening experience. This allows for the possibility of transmitting something about the location that feels coherent, which is typical of *Pardis Phase 11*.

Title: Sound Diary #1
Location: Pardis Phase 11, shopping area
Duration: 1:14

[Link to SoundCloud: https://soundcloud.com/sonicdiarytehran/sound-diary1-pphase11]
Listening to the recordings, one may notice that the dominant sound in nearly all of them is of cars. Going inside and outside of the mini-city, as well as moving around for shopping or other daily needs, all necessitates the use of a vehicle of some kind. The echoes of engine sounds travel far into the distance, and when they vanish, one is left alone between brutal concrete tower blocks. The location’s typology and climate dictate strong windy conditions, as can be heard in a few of the recordings. The sound of human interaction is rarely heard due to a lack of greenery and parks, as well as other public spaces such as libraries, recreation centres and playgrounds, which contribute to a low level of human interaction. Going for a walk, spending leisure time, dining out and other activities that one would expect from a neighbourhood do not exist. *Pardis Phase 11* is an isolated suburban housing development cut off from the rest of Tehran, enclosing life and privatising nature. As a result, the location has ghostly characteristics, which I intended to convey through the recordings. I am hoping that the recordings can be read and listened to as an indicator of social conditions and direct the attention of the listener to the perceptual situatedness of residents of *Pardis 11*. The sonic reality of this place is made up of heavy machinery interacting with the earth, constant movement of construction materials, and going in and out of *Pardis Phase 11*. There is a lack of sense of locality or neighbourhood-ness, and the recordings convey this.
To get to the Pardis mini-city, one must drive 50 kilometres east from Tehran on the Tehran–Pardis highway 77. Between the rural district of Jajroud and the Technology Park, there is a vast landscape full of concrete grey and white tower blocks protruding from the ground. In terms of pedestrian accessibility, walking in and out of this site is nearly impossible. It is necessary to own a personal vehicle for transportation. Before entering the site, one must pass through a tunnel, indicating that, prior to the start of construction, dynamite was used to clear the way and create a link between the site and the main road. This

547 https://soundcloud.com/sonicdiarytehran/sound-diary2-pphase11
emphasises the tower block’s remoteness and accessibility. As the area’s characteristic topography consists of a chain of hills that form a continuous elevated crest, the terrain on which these tower blocks are expanding has an underlying visual effect on the landscape. Accessing the grocery stores, schools, and other public facilities is nearly impossible for most residents without the use of a car. The only shopping area is roughly in the centre of the site, and due to the lack of pedestrian walkways, shopping is inconvenient for those who live outside of the centre.

Figure 39. Access tunnel to Pardis Phase 11. Photo taken by Saeed Moosavi, 2021.
As previously stated, the *Pardis* complex has been managed by the Kuzu Group (a Turkish company) since January 2010.\textsuperscript{548} The plan includes 76 schools, 31 sports facilities, 17 mosques, 7 health care centres, 7 cultural centres, and 3 public parks, according to the Kuzu Group website. However, nearly 10 years after the Pardis project began construction, there is still no evidence of greenery such as public gardens, public transportation, a children’s playground or public parks. It is clear that the project’s design and housing architecture do not represent any architectural innovation in terms of accessibility, ecological concerns and sustainable housing in relation to climate and environmental conditions. For example, it has been stated that up to 200,000 housing units in *Pardis Phase 11* are affected by a lack of access to water, heating and sewage systems.\textsuperscript{549}

\textsuperscript{548} Kuzu Group, ‘Maskan Mehr Project’ \(<\text{https://www.kuzugrup.com/Proje/Masken-Meher-Projesi}>\) [accessed 18 March 2021]

\textsuperscript{549} Messy Nessy Chic Blog.
The design and architecture of *Pardis Phase 11* could be compared to Le Corbusier’s Ville Radieuse plans (Radiant City), an unrealised urban master plan first presented in 1924 at the International Congress of Modern Architecture and commonly known by its French acronym CIAM. It is possible to say that *Pardis Phase 11* is an exact replica of the Ville Radieuse plan’s high-density housing typologies, exact symmetry and standardisation in accordance with modernist ideas of city planning. As Le Corbusier himself explains: ‘the city of today is a dying thing because its planning is not in the proportion of geometrical one fourth. The result of a true geometrical lay-out is repetition, the result of repetition is standard. The perfect form’.\(^{551}\) Although the scale and size of these two projects differ, the planning and architecture styles are similar.

\(^{550}\) [https://soundcloud.com/sonicdiarytehran/sound-diary3-pphase11](https://soundcloud.com/sonicdiarytehran/sound-diary3-pphase11)

Prefabricated high-density skyscrapers are spread across a vast, barren desert landscape surrounded by mountains.

Figure 40. Going towards Pardis Phase 11, before approaching the tunnel. Photo by Ali Mousavi.
There is no connection between the buildings and the landscape in Pardis. The urban design and built-up form of *Pardis Phase 11* are characterised by a repetitive, rigid geometrical layout. The plan of *Pardis Phase 11* has been to provide residents with a range of zonal facilities: schools, parks, hospitals, public
transportation and mosques. But after many years of construction, the implementation of such plans proved haphazard. This notion of zoning planning was also at the core of Le Corbusier’s vision for his Ville Radieuse project: a planned city strictly divided into segregated sections: residential areas, commercial, entertainment and business.\(^{552}\)

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Title: Sound Diary #4  
Location: Pardis Phase 11  
Duration: 4:01 min  
Audio channels: Mono  
Time of recording: 15:30  
Device: Zoom H2N  
Sample rate: 48 kHz

\(^{552}\) Ibid.

\(^{553}\) https://soundcloud.com/sonicdiarytehran/sound-diary6-pphase11
This type of planning has been linked to a functional system of architecture and a linear city planning system. (See the next page for a colour coding spatial analysis.) When designing a mini-city in this manner, each section is made up of a series of highly specialised functional sectors. Mumford envisions this way of organising life as if ‘the end product is an encapsulated life, spent more and more either in a motor car or within the cabin of darkness before a television set’.\footnote{Kunstler.} A separation of residential zones from green spaces and transportation routes indicates that the entire architectural design of Pardis city is in a totalitarian model. Additionally, this case study attempts to represent the issue of power and social logic in relation to built form. I used the space syntax analysis method developed by Hillier and Hanson in their book \textit{The Social Logic of Space} (2003), in which they categorise building plans into three primary spatial syntactic structures.\footnote{Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, \textit{The Social Logic of Space} (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).}

Spatial analysis

\begin{itemize}
  \item [A)] \textit{Enfilade: Linear structure}
  \item [B)] \textit{Network: Ringy structure}
  \item [C)] \textit{Fan: Branching structure}
\end{itemize}
I adapted their method of space syntax analysis to uncover the socio-spatial structure of tower block apartment planning in *Pardis Phase 11*. Each building plan has been colour coded to demonstrate how life is framed within this planning. By adapting this analytical method to building interiors and planning, I intend to show how the planning can be analysed and compared in terms of how spaces are arranged and relate to each other, as well as how a building works in terms of the relations between the residents and visitors. These structures are designed in a linear fashion. In architecture, this type of structure is referred to as ‘enfilade’. Dovey describes the enfilade or linear structure as a ‘string of spatial segments in sequence’ in which ‘there are no choice pathways from one segment to another’. The second model is the network or ringy structure, which is the opposite of the enfilade model in that there is a connection between each section and access to different parts of the plan. The third plan is the fan or branching model, which, Dovey explains, ‘controls access to a range of spaces from a single segment, like a corridor or hallway; in practice,
nearly all buildings are structured in a combination of these basic syntactic structures'.

Although these three plans are similar, they each have a unique spatial structure that will determine different social relations. As evidenced by the colour-coding analysis presented here, the developers and organisers of the project used enfilade or linear structure planning in all of the tower houses. Analysing the enfilade or linear structure reveals that, in this type of planning, the degree of control in each section of the plan is greater than in the other two. Dovey observes that the linear or fanned structure controls circulation and social interaction in certain key spaces; the degree of ‘control’ of a given cell is the degree to which access to other cells must pass through it.

What this all means for me is that, after discussion of the technical, material and functional objectives of design and planning a building—which can be considered the practical aspects of buildings—one can add a second dimension: that of the meaning and social relations that a building creates. For Hillier and Hanson, this second dimension comes into play because of the style of the building, i.e., decoration, embellishments and the shape given to that artefact that puts it in the realm of meaning and cultural distinctiveness.

By extension, it can also be said that buildings belong in two realms of practical use and social use. Consequently, constructions such as Pardis phase 11 have both functional and meaningful characteristics. It is these two realms of Pardis Phase 11 that, as an artist–researcher, I have been trying to explore and understand through sensory methodologies.

557 Ibid.

558 Ibid.

Figure 43. Digital photo collage made by Ali Mousavi.
Figure 44. Digital photo collage made by Ali Mousavi.
Figure 45. Digital photo collage made by Ali Mousavi.
Figure 46. Digital photo collage made by Ali Mousavi.
Figure 47. Heavy machinery in operation in Pardis Phase 11. Photo taken by Ali Mousavi.

Figure 48. Creating infrastructure for roads and highways in Pardis Phase 11. Photo taken by Ali Mousavi.
Figure 49. Construction work in *Pardis Phase 11*. Photo taken by Ali Mousavi.

Figure 50. Construction work in *Pardis Phase 11*. Photo taken by Ali Mousavi.
Figure 51. Construction work in *Pardis Phase 11*. Photo taken by Ali Mousavi.
Figure 52. Close-up image from one of the residential tower blocks in Pardi Phase 11. Photo taken by Ali Mousavi.
Other Stories, Other Voices

When a self does appear it always involves an experience of another; there could not be an experience of a self simply by itself. ... When a self does appear in experience it appears over against the other, and we have been delineating the condition under which this other does appear in the experience of the human animal, namely in the presence of that sort of stimulation in the co-operative activity which arouses in the individual himself of the same response it arouses in the other.\textsuperscript{560}

I have spent a few years exploring the \textit{Pardis Phase 11} area during different seasons. I listened for hours, recorded sound for hours. I opened and closed my camera’s shutter as many as 500 times and exposed numerous 35-mm black-and-white and colour rolls of film and medium-format roll films of various speeds; filled up 32 and 64 GB SD cards on my digital camera; recorded hours and hours of video footage; touched as many objects and surfaces as possible; and tried to activate my sense of smell as well. As an artist–researcher, I dissolved my subjectivity and exposed all my senses to absorb everything that this environment had to offer. Although all of this has been a great endeavour and search for meaning-making through the senses, I felt like I was an outsider. This research needed other voices, other stories to be told from inside \textit{Pardis Phase 11}.

Therefore, I set out to recruit participants from among the actual residents of \textit{Pardis Phase 11}. During a lengthy period, I wandered around retail and residential areas, approaching people and asking if they would like to share their views on the experience of living in \textit{Pardis Phase 11} day to day. This did not prove to be an easy task at all. Firstly, I was nervous and not quite sure how to approach people to ask them about their living conditions and how they felt in such a place. And secondly, at no time of the day was there a group of people present to approach and have the liberty to choose one or two to ask for their

participation. *Pardis Phase 11* is a vast area of tower block apartments, divided and scattered all around. While there are different zones and each zone has 4–6 tower blocks next to each other, they are isolated from the rest of the area (see the images presented in the previous chapter). What this means is that, except for the shopping area, most of the time there are only one or two individuals walking in this place. Therefore, approaching individuals who are isolated in this vast barren area is not an easy task, and getting a person interested and willing to open up to a stranger was purely a matter of luck. However, I managed to talk to 5–7 people; a few of these were hesitant and not interested in participating. The conversation only developed further with three people; these interviews are presented here.

**#1 Amir and Saeed’s Story**

*Iran, Tehran, 15th of February 2022*

On a sunny but rather cold day, I set out to drive from Tehran to *Pardis Phase 11* (hereafter called *Pardis*), hoping to have a conversation and get some insight into living conditions from residents of *Pardis*. My research on *Pardis* had gotten to the point where participation from residents was the only missing piece of the puzzle. It took me 45 minutes to get there, so I parked the car in the main and oldest shopping area (one grocery store, a bakery, an Internet cafe, which, according to Amir Ali, ‘is always closed’, a gaming shop where young people can play PlayStation, and three or four estate agents). The other shops appeared to be recently vacated, as they bits and pieces of previous businesses had been left behind. There were also other shops that were new and still awaiting opening day. But, in general, there are more estate agents than any other kind of establishment in *Pardis Phase 11*.

Nevertheless, I set up my Zoom recorder and started to walk up the hill towards the school. I decided to talk to teenagers and young people. During my visits to *Pardis Phase 11* throughout the years of my research, I have always asked myself, what do young people do in such a place? Thinking to myself that for sure this must be a boring place for young people, as it does not provide social activities for its residents. However, by the time I reached the top of the hill school had just finished and all the pupils were rushing to get out. This was a very interesting occasion for me as it was the first time that I had seen lots of

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561 For security and ethical reasons, these names are fake.
people at one time together in *Pardis*, including the many parents who had driven to the school to pick up their kids. In the blink of an eye, lots of them disappeared into their cars, but there remained a considerable number of pupils walking around, perhaps heading home. I decided to walk amongst them and hope to find one or two who were willing to talk to me. As I was walking, I saw a group of four or five pupils gathering around a bench on the pavement, so I approached them and said:

Me: Hi Guys, how are you? Just wanted to talk to you and ask a few questions about Pardis 11, please?

Boys: Hello, mister.

They looked at each other and a few of them left; there remained only two.

Me: What’s your name?

Boys: (first one) Amir; (second one) Saeed
What’s your name, mister?

Me: My name is Ali. So, would you like to talk to me about Pardis?

Amir and Saeed: Yes, okay.

Me: Is it okay if I record our conversation, please? [showing them my recorder]

Amir: Where will this be used? Is it for TV or radio?

Me: No, these won’t be used for anything like that. I am a student and this is for my research study and will be shared with my supervisor.

Amir and Saeed: Aha, okay.

Me: So, tell me, how long have you been living here for?
Amir: Me, three years.

Me: You guys are going to secondary school, right?

Amir: Yes, we are year 11.

Me: How’s your school? Any issues at school?

Amir: Oh, many issues, many. For example, look at that side of the school—they are doing some construction work. And they offload all their unwanted materials onto our football field. All over the football field there is dirt and rubbish from the construction site! The area they are working on is almost 230–250 square metres; so far, they have taken half of it and dumped it in our football field. The field is now full of many big chunks of asphalt. Many issues, mister.

Me: Other than this football field, is there any other sport complex or facility here in Pardis?

Amir: In the whole area there is only one sports complex, which is in zone 5 and it is on the other side of Pardis.

Me: Does the complex have a proper football pitch with grass?

Amir: Yes, there is one.

Me: How about a swimming pool, or tennis court?

Amir: [looks at Saeed and they both smile sarcastically] Swimming pool? No, nothing like that exists here.

Me: You mean in the whole of Pardis Phase 11?

Amir: The whole place has nothing, nothing. In the whole area we have only two bakeries. There is only one pharmacy, which is very basic, and rumour has it that there will be another one opening in the future. For instance, there is only one park here. I mean, it is not really a park, it doesn’t have a green area. You don’t feel relaxed and comfortable there, the whole park is 200 square metres. If you don’t believe me, go and have a look for yourself. We cannot even go to this little park, because most of the time the thugs and drug dealers are occupying
the place. So my parents are against it totally, and don’t allow me to go out after school.

Me: So what do you do after school? For example, do you go out with Saeed?

Amir: Nothing, really; I stay home and stare at the wall like a goat! With Saeed we sometimes just wander around the blocks during the daylight. Other than this, most of the kids are at home and do nothing. Generally, there is not anywhere here that you can have fun.

Me: If you wanted to give a suggestion to builders or construction groups to build something here and improve the area, what would you suggest?

Saeed: Umm, maybe a games net. No, not a games net. Another proper football pitch or sports complex.

Me: You said that most of the time you are at home here. Can you tell me a bit about the houses here, please? What’s it like to live in one of these apartments?

Saeed: Houses? If you look at this one [he points to one of the tower blocks not far from where we are standing], there is a huge crack on the side, which has been caused by leaking water. My father was saying that there is something wrong with the pipe system in the blocks. Actually, most of the blocks here have the same problem. So sometimes when people are using water there will be a flood outside the block on the ground or water leaking in the basement.

Me: Which floor is your apartment on?

Saeed: Tenth floor.

Me: Then you must have a great view, ha?

[Saeed smiles unconvincingly.]

Me: Tell me about the noise and sound here. What do you hear the most?
Saeed: A lot of noise and the sounds of the neighbours, you can even hear them flushing their toilets. You know, mister, the other issue is water and electricity. When the electricity goes off, the water goes off too, so no electricity means no water.

Me: Does the electricity go out very often?

Saeedi: Electricity? Oh yes, very often; it’s routine here, especially during the summer. Mister, let me tell you this: We ask only for a proper sports complex and a better school. My house is over there on top of the hill. You see all those other houses in the distance? All those kids have to come to this side of Pardis for school and playing; the rest of this place is a desert. The whole place is just a desert, it’s a desert. At least a proper football pitch and a proper park, a swimming pool; at least something that we can be happy about.

Me: Can I ask if you guys are more unsatisfied with the lack of facilities and playing ground or your houses, or both?

Saeed and Amir [both answer at the same time]: Playing ground and facilities.

Saeed: The house is not really our business, but playing and having fun is. We just want a fun area, that’s all.

Me: I hope things improve here for you. I understand that at the moment this place does not have much to offer you. Anyway, thank you very much for your time. You have helped me a lot.

Saeed and Amir: You’re welcome, mister, go and have a look at the park yourself, then you will understand what we mean. Go and wander around; you will see that there is nothing here, nothing. Good luck. Bye.

Me: Sure, I will do that. Thanks again and good luck.

At this point I stopped the recording and walked with Amir and Saeed towards the park. They showed me the path to the park and said goodbye. I continued wandering around in Pardis like many other times, thinking about the condition of life for residents of Pardis Phase 11, in particular young people like Amir and Saeed. The personal experience of Amir and Saeed was another indication to me that the planners and the Kuzu Group privileged space over place making. The
difference between the two is the pace of people navigating and their presence in a particular area. ‘As a general proposition, people move through a space and dwell in a place’.\textsuperscript{562} Constant movement through an area does not allow for awareness and engagement with the particularities of that environment. In other words, it diminishes the experience and sense of belonging of a place. This is very much true in the case of Pardis Phase 11, as people are constantly moving through different zones with their cars, whether to pick up their kids from school or going to do their essential grocery shopping. The missing element is the feeling of neighbourliness. The master planning of Pardis has suffocated the intimate social structure of a community life. It was clear that neither Amir nor Saeed had any intimate attachment or sense of deep care for their living environment. However, as I mulled over all these thoughts, I realised that I was back in Tehran and so started thinking about going back to Pardis again on a different day to find another keen resident and listen to another story about their personal experience of the suburban area/space of Pardis Phase 11.

#2 Ramtin’s Story

Iran, Tehran, 17th of February 2022

Two days after my conversation with Amir and Saeed, I set out to drive to Pardis again. I arrived there around 11:30 a.m., and, as usual, parked my car, prepared my equipment and started walking around. It took me around an hour before I approached the first person who was walking towards me not far from the residential tower blocks on my left side. It was a guy roughly the same age as myself—around 40 to 45, I thought. So I stopped him and asked if it was possible to talk about the area and his experience of the place. Before he started to say anything, I quickly added that I’m a student working on a research project and as part of my research I like to listen to people who are based here. I didn’t want him to refuse, so assured him that that was all there was to it. Fortunately, he said yes and that he was happy to help. I asked for his permission for the conversation to be recorded and as he was lighting up a cigarette he nodded his head and said yes.

Me: How long have you been living here?

Ramtin: It’s been a year and half.

Me: What do you think so far? Any issues?

Ramtin: There are many issues; where do you want me to start? First thing and an important issue here is public transport in Pardis Phase 11. The public transport in older phases like 2, 3, 4 is better, but even they don’t have buses or tubes. Although we have been told that in the next two or three years, the Pardis metro line will be constructed here. But what that really means is that it takes another four or five to start the project and it takes another five years to finish it, so after 10 years we might have some sort of public transport here. In the current situation, it is a disaster for anyone without a personal car. For instance, if you look, there is a small grocery store over there that opened only last month. Before that one, all the residents in this zone had to go all the way down to the main and only shopping area. And that is almost an impossible task if you don’t have a car, because walking up and down these hills here with or without shopping bags is not easy. I can give you another example if you like?

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563 For security and ethical reasons, the name is fake.
Me: Sure, I would love to hear it.

Ramtin: Another shocking thing is that we don't have any parks here! You don't see any green areas; it's all soil and desert-like. Creating a green area and park was also part of the plan from the beginning. But after many years of construction, you still don't see one square metre of greenery! I guess you were not expecting to hear so many negative things, were you?

Me: I like to hear about both positive and negative. Whatever you think and feel should be addressed.

Ramtin: Look, there are also positive aspects here. For example, they have recently opened a new, small hospital, which is the building there on top of the hill. In terms of opening more grocery stores and other kinds of shops, things are improving slowly. But at the same time, we don't have green areas, and entertainment centres, sport centres, concert or theatre halls have become luxury items here. Not having access to such services has become the norm. Look, dear Ali, I have a Master of Business Administration (MBA) in marketing. And one of the items that we had to study was Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which is presented in a pyramid where the most basic needs are in the lowest part of the pyramid. In this system, the most basic needs must be fulfilled before moving up and achieving higher goals. In my view, the people in Pardis Phase 11 are stuck in the lowest part of the pyramid. This inaccessibility of basic needs has created an angry mood amongst the residents here. Before moving to Pardis, I lived my whole life in Tehran in different areas; never had I experienced so much anger as here!

Me: You mentioned the basic needs and lack of any entertainment, sport and leisure centre here. I'm thinking about younger people here, how might this situation affect them? Can you share your thoughts on that with me, please?

Ramtin: Sure, this is a good point. Look, I don't have the exact numbers, but from what I have seen so far, the majority of Pardis residents are young couples
or young families with one or two kids. Most of these families came here from Tehran or other big cities, so they have experience of city life. What I mean is that most of them are familiar with activities such as going to art galleries, cinemas, theatres, coffee shops and other activities. But in *Pardis Phase 11* none of these are available or provided, and this is a very very big issue.

Me: If we move on from these issues now and focus on the actual houses, can you tell me about the overall quality of and access to natural resources like water, electricity and gas, please?

Ramtin: Yes, sure thing. Look, all of these tower blocks are 14 stories and consist of 57 flats. And there are 40–45,000 of these flats, although the original plan was to build 35,000 flats. But they have expanded the project to include roughly 60,000 flats. All of these tower blocks have a water pump that works with electricity; therefore, any power cut means no access to water. A power cut here also means no access to lifts, and this is a huge problem for flats that are higher up. I have to add that power cuts are routine here and usually last around 2–4 hours daily and sometimes even longer. Anyway, you know, to plan a massive housing construction like *Pardis Phase 11*, firstly, there must be detailed and thorough infrastructure in place. This area just does not have the necessary infrastructure for 60,000 flats!

Me: I understand. As you probably know, the running of construction here is by a Turkish company called Kuzu. Do you have any idea why there is no involvement of an Iranian company or Iranian architects or designers for such a project?

Ramtin: Well, well, here is where it gets political! I have heard that the start of this project was during the Ahmadinejad presidency between 2005 and 2013. And the owner of the company is the brother of Turkey’s prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In other words, there is some sort of relation and involvement that can be traced back to them. There are other fishy stories that people tell about this place. Never mind now, but *Pardis Phase 11* is one of their projects in Iran, they are involved in other projects in Isfahan, Shiraz and Karaj.

Me: What about the interior design and materials used in the flats? Can you tell me a bit about that, please?

Ramtin: Let me put it this way for you: in terms of materials they have used and are still using the cheapest possible materials available on the market. The
cheapest ceramics, tiles, pipes, bathroom taps, sinks, kitchen units and anything and everything you can imagine! Most of the flats suffer from water leaks in the bathroom because the insulation hasn’t been done properly and professionally. I had a problem in my own bathroom; the neighbour below me came over and complained about the leak. So I had to bring someone myself and pay out of my own pocket to fix it! I have been told by other residents that some of the toilets and bathrooms don’t even have insulation! It is hard to believe, but it’s true.

Me: Yes, it is shocking how a massive project like this has been mismanaged.

Ramtin: Oh, by the way, the other issue that many people here complain about is the noise.

Me: What do you mean? From your neighbours?

Ramtin: From neighbours and everything really, it is very strange. For instance, if the flat on the first floor is doing some work, I don’t know, let’s say if they are hanging a frame on their wall, I can hear the sound of the hammer on the 10th floor! First, I thought maybe it was because our block has many empty flats; the sound echoes back. But the block is now almost full and we still have this strange echo of sound in the whole block! I can hear my neighbour’s TV as if it were in my living room, which really gets on my nerves. I don’t know if the walls are made of MDF or some sort of thin layer of cheap material. The water leakage is the creepiest thing—you get a water drip echo sound effect, oh dear [smiles and shakes his head with disbelief].

And so our conversation continued for another hour or so.

The Search for Place amid the Hostility of Placelessness

From my conversations with residents, it became clear to me that there are a lot of people living in Pardis Phase 11 who are dissatisfied with the condition of life. Young couples searching for cheaper rent, young families hoping to buy their own home in suburban Tehran (a dream that has evaporated into thin air as
inflation made it impossible for them), and other people migrating from rural areas or small cities hoping to find work in Tehran: they all seemed to be in the same boat. As Ramtin told me, the residents of Pardis are ‘refugees from Tehran and other cities, who ended up there for various reasons’. However, by the time I was ready to go back home, the sun was setting and the streetlights were coming on. In Tehran and other Iranian cities, nightlife is an important part of the culture and a popular time for entertainment. However, there are no signs of nightlife or human interaction in Pardis Phase 11.

By extension, my conversations with residents have been an attempt to develop an alternative approach to understanding the environment of Pardis Phase 11. Here the concern has not been with abstract models and theories, but with empirical findings, lived experience, the setting and situations people live in, and their day-to-day activities. Additionally, the essence of the interviews/conversations is a manifestation of a deeply felt involvement from residents and their broken relationship with Pardis Phase 11. Therefore, it has been a disturbing experience for me to witness so many natural resources being used, so much planning and remaking of landscapes taking place, and so much ignorance and lack of attention to the importance of the psychological link between people and the place they live in. It is not difficult to see that investors, planners and the construction company of Kuzo in Pardis Phase 11 paid no attention to the buildings’ relationship to the surrounding environment, to the concept of locality and community, or to the history and cultural identity of the people living there. This reflects the placelessness of modern urban development, and has ‘been extensively condemned for creating a homogeneous, monotonous and characterless urbanscape, lacking any profound sense of place’.564 These homogeneous urban developments and new towns do not share anything with places of the past, as Christian Norberg-Schulz, in his book Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture, asserts:

> Spatially the new settlements do not any more possess enclosure and density. They usually consist of buildings “freely” placed within a park-like space. Streets and squares in the traditional sense are no longer found, and the general result is a scattered assembly of units. This implies that a distinct figure - ground relationship no more exists; the continuity of the landscape is interrupted.565

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564 Shirazi.

As a consequence, the created urban landscape is deprived of any coherence; the streets and squares do not represent or function in their traditional roles, and all of these indicate a loss of place. ‘Most modern buildings exist in a “nowhere”; they are not related to a landscape and not coherent, urban whole, but live their abstract life in a kind of a mathematical-technological space which hardly distinguishes between up and down’.  

This attitude towards the living environment is what Relph calls an inauthentic attitude, which is, ‘essentially[,] no sense of place, for it involves no awareness of the deep and symbolic significances of places and no appreciation of their identities’. The inauthentic attitude encourages ‘placelessness’, which is weakening the identity of places to the point where they not only look alike but feel alike and offer the same bland possibilities of experience. In this placeless environment, nothing is linked to the landscape; the streets, roads and squares are just cuts through the landscape. They are networks that allow for constant movement and travelling through; ‘consequently, social contact is reduced and uniformity becomes endemic’.  

This was very much evident from my conversations with residents and also from my own observations in the suburb of Pardis Phase 11. Moreover, the emergence of a placeless urban fabric within cities and also in suburbia is what Relph refers to as ‘subtopia’, or the ‘mindless mixing up of all man-made objects without any pattern of purpose or relationship’. The essence and logic of subtopia is to develop a characterless uniformity of living environment, and to reduce the standard quality of life within an isolated container of buildings. As King observes, ‘The essence of the modern suburb is physical, social and spatial separation. The suburb is spatially separated from the city and, more particularly each household unit is spatially separated from the others’.

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566 Norberg-Schulz.
567 Relph.
568 Ibid.
569 Shirazi.
570 Relph.
571 King.
This kind of approach and investment in real estate reminds me of Sennett’s two real estate investment models from his book *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City*: ‘opportunity investing’ and ‘core investing’.\(^{572}\) In the former model, the investor is searching for a lucrative deal; with a group of scouts, the opportunity investor is looking for a good spot for property development.\(^{573}\) As an example of this model, Sennett mentions the commercial centre of Canary Wharf in London, which contains many high-rise glass buildings and was opened in 1993.\(^{574}\)

Canary Wharf was built by international property developers from Canada, who had the opportunity to get hold of vast stretches of land and abandoned docks in southeast London.\(^{575}\) The Canadian developers hired local experts to look for property owners who were willing to sell their derelict and deserted buildings in the area, not realising the true value of what they owned.\(^{576}\) The opportunity investors predict a high profit return on the investment they put into a project like Canary Wharf. ‘The economic point for opportunity investors is that tipping points magnify value in making sudden jumps’.\(^{577}\) In the latter model, ‘core investing’, the investors or parties with the means of production do not necessarily know or are not able to predict the tipping point or profit margin of a new project.

As Sennett explains:

> Essentially, core investing puts money into a set of parameters, a set of specifications. Once you decide on the specs, you look for a place in which to build. The procedure suits globalization because the number of square meters involved, the quantity of materials and labour time can all be decided and then picked at a distance. The core investor is going to treat place just like money; indeed, in many of the sophisticated real-estate transactions,

\(^{572}\) Sennett, *Building and Dwelling*.

\(^{573}\) Sennett, *Building and Dwelling*.


\(^{575}\) Sennett, *Building and Dwelling*.

\(^{576}\) Ibid.

\(^{577}\) Ibid.
specifications for buildings determine the value of trades, rather than the actual buildings.\textsuperscript{578}

I believe this description of the ‘core investing’ model by Sennett very much resonates with the \textit{Pardis Phase 11} project run by the Turkish Kuzo group. The core investors make their margin profit through massive interventions in usually a huge area of barren land provided by local governments in the outskirts of different cities. Earlier, in Ramtin’s story, he mentioned that the Kuzo group is also involved in other mega-housing construction projects in other cities in Iran. Moreover, ‘core investing particularly suits the practice of “flipping”—that is, investing in the creation and construction of a building and then selling it on before it is actually finished’.\textsuperscript{579} This is also a common case in \textit{Pardis 11} and is known as پیش فروش و پیش خرید, meaning presell and prebuy; in other words, when a flat is halfway to the finishing line, it will be sold. As mentioned above, this model of investing is about money and treats all the given locations as another project to increase profit while ignoring the users of those places. It is equally important to understand the interconnection between place and experience, as it is not ‘that place is properly something only encountered ‘in’ experience, but rather that place is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience’.\textsuperscript{580}

Moreover, these stories are not just about people’s experience and ties to their environment; it is also about how things appear to us, our encounter with the environment and our relation to such experience. ‘It is, indeed, only in and through place that the world presents itself- it is in place, and in relation to our own being - in - place, that the world begins’.\textsuperscript{581} To put it another way, a place or built environment cannot be independent of subjectivity, nor can it be viewed purely on an objective basis. For instance, the \textit{Pardis Phase 11} area does not

\textsuperscript{578} Ibid, p. 104.

\textsuperscript{579} Sennett, \textit{Building and Dwelling}.

\textsuperscript{580} Malpas, 2018.

\textsuperscript{581} Malpas, 2018.
simply stand there ready for the observation and experience of the residents. Instead, it encompasses the residents, so the possible condition of subjectivity is through the structure of this urban placelessness. In this respect, there is a reciprocal relationship between object and subject and between place and experience. Neither can be isolated and independent of the other; this has been the main concern and exploration of this multi-sensory research.

**Conclusion: One amongst Many**

The journey undertaken in this multi-sensory artistic research began with an interest in making a multi-sensory inquiry into city life in a specific suburban area close to the city of Tehran, Iran called *Pardis Phase 11*. It has developed via an exploration of the way in which a particular place and location becomes universal—or even opens up the worlds of progress and modernity. This journey has involved overlapping excursions through a variety of concepts such as nature, progress, modernity, urban space and place. To fully grasp each of these concepts, it was necessary to study them in relation to one another. From first to last, these topics complement and support each other; thus, each chapter creates the foundation and context for the next one.

The core object under study in this research was the city, which is the product of human activity and the result of humanity’s encounter with nature. In other words, how a city and living environment are shaped and designed is related to how nature and natural resources are viewed. Consequently, the morphology of space and the structure of built form in a city could be viewed as an expression of the values of a society. Therefore, it seemed essential to find out about different concepts and meanings of nature, how these changed over time and how they affected the socio-physical environment. For instance, I have looked at the ideas of nature from the three standpoints of Christianity, Islam and modernism. The study of the concepts of nature was to create a foundation and context for the examination of concepts such as modernity, progress and urban space. In other words, to have a better understanding of the changes brought by ideas of progress and modernity, it was necessary to engage in historical regression to identify the roots of these concepts.
What followed from the discussion of nature and modernity in the thesis was an unravelling of the concept of urban space. I presented an exploration of the concept of space and structure of spatiality within the Western philosophical tradition. This continued by looking more closely at different notions of space, i.e., abstract and geometrical. The debate around the concept of space in philosophy, mathematics and physics offered a useful initial step in an investigation of the social dimension of space. The analysis of these notions provided the foundation for further clarification of the concept of social space as the context of lived and everyday experience. The aim of clarifying the concepts was to distinguish between subjective and objective notions of space. Additionally, as a researcher I intended to emphasise that urban space and place can neither be viewed as purely objective concepts nor treated as purely subjective. Therefore, the relationship between space and place was examined in order to represent a multi-sensory experience of the city of Tehran and, in particular, *Pardis Phase 11.*

The multi-sensory artistic project was presented by employing sensory methodologies such as sound recording, listening, smelling, mapping, photo collaging and conversation as primary tools of investigation. The objective was to gain a new understanding of the social aspects of urban and built form (placemaking). The role played by the project was crucial to bridge the gap between subject/object, thought/felt and concrete/experience. Thus, the artistic project involved the acting agent/researcher with the object under study, i.e., space/place (*Pardis Phase 11*). It was argued that, in the absence of an active agent/researcher or human interaction with some capacity of experiencing and conceptualising, the space/place cannot be fully grasped. Therefore, multi-sensory experience of the space/place was a critical aspect and necessary for having a better understanding of what was happening on the ground during everyday life in that particular location (*Pardis Phase 11*).

Furthermore, I argued in the thesis that the tension between traditionalism, which in Farsi translates as *sonnat*, and modernity, which translates as *tajjadod*, has had a major effect on the urban scene in the city of Tehran. It
was noted, from the outset, that when the concepts and ideas of progress, modernity and Westernisation were introduced in Iran, there also appeared a parallel resistance and anti-modern, anti-Western attitude. In this regard, firstly, I presented a historical overview of the main policies and trends that influenced the city of Tehran in the field of urban planning. Secondly, I showed how borrowed external concepts like modernisation and progress came into conflict with internal sets of logic in the context of urban planning and design. This transformed the premodern city of Tehran, once known as the ‘pomegranate garden’, into a chaotic spatial matrix without any reference to its past. In other words, it is a production of space that has been oscillating between two poles: from a local place to one in the global placeless style.

I have argued that, from the 1930s onwards, the process of modernisation and urban planning in the city of Tehran contributed to an urban placelessness.

In this research, what I had in mind was that part of the traditional urban form, design and architecture of the past in Iran, in particular in Tehran, was and still is applicable to contemporary urban planning and design.

This led me to think about how conflicts between the particular/universal, East/West, tradition/modernity and place/placelessness can be resolved. Rather than being reactionary and rejecting one and accepting the other, the essence of the past could be re-interpreted to produce new forms. To counterbalance these conflicts, I proposed a dialectical relationship in which a dialogue and reconciliation between the old and new takes place. In this way, I aimed for a mediatory approach in which the tension between two forces could be turned into a productive situation. As argued in the thesis, the overwhelming power of the global style of urban design and acceleration of the production of placelessness has washed away the distinctiveness of many cities around the globe. Thus, it is crucial to halt this overwhelming power of globalisation, find one’s own cultural/local identity and encourage a sense of historical continuity, home and community.

In this regard, I introduced Critical Regionalism as an alternative approach to place-making. As discussed, my main interest in proposing Critical Regionalism was that it is a ‘theory of place’ in principle and by intention. It favours creating places and it stands against the overwhelming power of the
global style of the production of placelessness. Additionally, the potential of Critical Regionalism to effect reconciliation between the local/universal and traditional/modern made it a strong alternative solution to the problems addressed in this research. Moreover, I believe that it is within the particular conditions of a localised context that possibilities of an alternative set of ideas can develop and be actualised. Critical Regionalism allows a site-specific understanding of the conditions for better urban planning. I suggested that the concept of Critical Regionalism can be taken into account in contemporary practices of urban planning and design in Tehran.

In the last part of this concluding chapter, I would like to present what was argued in the case of the city of Tehran as responses to the research questions. I have argued that the urban planning and housing architecture of post-revolutionary Iran, in the context of their anti-imperialism slogans since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, continued to produce the same Western modern ideas as their predecessors of the Pahlavi era. This is connected with my first research question:

- Has Tehran’s city planning and housing architecture been successful in overcoming the tensions between tradition and modernity, locality and globalisation?

The regime reproduced a chaotic capitalist model of urban design and housing architecture, which represents a ‘contradictory space’. I intended to show in this artistic research that the government and decision-makers have created a city that is built on the Western concept of city planning and organisation. The regime has not in any constructive manner offered an alternative to the dominant Western style of urban planning. Post-revolutionary urban planning is stuck between the two forces of Traditionalism and Modernism; thus, the call for Islamic architecture and urbanism remained only a proposal on paper. The hostile attitude and rejection of modernism by revolutionaries has proven to be an extreme reaction and no alternative solution has been proposed. On the ground, in the field of urban planning and architecture, state-led mega housing
projects followed a fallacious Western modernist global model. Islamic and
traditional design and architecture being used by officials and religious
establishments can only be seen in the construction of new mosques. The
new urban fabric and planning created does not have continuity with nor a
meaningful relationship to the historical and traditional identity. New
additions and modifications to the urban environment take place without
consideration of the existing fabric of the city and local conditions.

At this point I would like to address my second research question:

- What can we find in the tradition and history of Iranian urban planning
  that would help us understand the present and point towards the
  future?

The significant factors that influenced traditional urban planning—the physical
geography and internal structure of the cities—were determined by the natural
environment, such as the climate characteristics, water and topography of the
Iranian plateau.\textsuperscript{582} Natural determinants played a huge part in shaping the
urban form of cities. Therefore, the urban structure of the traditional Iranian
city took the shape it did due to the cultural–historical response to its particular
natural determinants. In the case of Iranian cities, as the climate and weather
conditions varied in different parts of the country, the shape, urban form and
planning of the cities depended on local climate circumstances. Other factors
such as cultural variations, economic circumstances and traditional customs
play a role in shaping the form of cities. As Amos Rapoport mentions in his book
*House, Form and Culture* (1969), ‘people with very different attitudes and ideals
respond to varied physical environments. These responses varied from place to
place because of changes and differences in the interplay of social, cultural,
ritual, economic and physical factors’.\textsuperscript{583}

What I found in the past was an internal logic of compact urban form and
planning, with residential density, narrow streets and alleyways, minimisation of
space and uniformity of height of buildings. All of these elements reflect the
awareness of Iranian planners of the physical morphology of their landscape.
Additionally, this compact urban system proved to be a perfect response to the

\textsuperscript{582} It should be mentioned that natural determinants were influential in shaping the urban form of most
cities and urban settlements.

\textsuperscript{583} Amos Rapoport, *House, Form and Culture* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice
Hall, 1969).
natural and social circumstances and offered many advantages to the city and its inhabitants. Another important element in the traditional urban planning and design that should be mentioned in response to the research question are the fact that the narrow streets and labyrinthine alleyways in the traditional urban form of the city operated as channels for the circulation of air and heat exchange. Therefore, they balance and play a crucial role in the climate of the city.

In contrast to these past traditional approaches, the present urban design of open, wide streets and straight, wide boulevards functions in the opposite manner to that described above. For instance, in hot, arid cities hot, dusty winds and sandstorms, which are very common, blow through the streets during the day, and there is extremely cold wind during the night. Another prime example of the contrast between past and present in design approaches is the height of buildings. In the past, except for mosques and minarets, all buildings adhered to a uniformity of height throughout the entire city. The thinking behind this uniformity and avoiding constructing tall buildings was to allow the dusty wind to move freely above the city, so the wind would not be diverted downward into the residential areas and other parts of the city. In the current situation, building high-rise tower blocks in a climate where extreme and frequent winds causes a lot of problems for inhabitants as the cold and hot winds are diverted downwards between the buildings, and create unwanted turbulence and noise. The noise created by strong wind was experienced by myself and also was mentioned in my conversations with some of the residents of Pardis Phase 11.

To answer the final part of the question above, what can be learnt from the past and present in working towards the future? As I have already mentioned in this concluding chapter and also elsewhere in the thesis, the past and present picture of urban development and planning in Tehran provides us with some promising pointers for the future. Perhaps the last 150 years of urban history and development in Tehran teaches us to adapt a mediatory approach. Tehran, once a small village, has grown and spread in all directions into a giant megapolis. It faces a lot of challenges such as air pollution, transport, water shortages, and other social and environmental problems. These challenges also suggest that an effort is needed at all levels of interdisciplinary theory and practice—a
To summarise, first it is crucial to accept the necessity of change as well as recognize the importance of continuity of historical and cultural identity. Secondly, it is important to create a new place that is rooted in the essential characteristics of a particular locality that can be changed from one locale to another. Lastly, we must generate a new critical regionalism that is responsive to the environmental and social challenges of a globalised world. I suggest that Critical Regionalism, as a theory of place-making, is vital in the case of Iranian cities. What makes Critical Regionalism crucial is its potential to resist the forces of global style, and its potential for creating a dialectical dialogue between local/universal, place/placelessness and traditional/modern. It is possible to re-interpret Critical Regionalism to produce new forms that are responsive to the different factors that play a role in shaping our built environment. Building on this foundation can be a starting point to humanise our built environment and our lives. Moreover, I view critical regionalism as an invitation to think about the built environment historically, spatially, socially, critically, technically and globally.

Throughout the thesis, I have provided a reflexive and multi-sensory account of the problems of urban planning and design in the city of Tehran, in particular *Pardis Phase 11*. This practice-led research’s original contributions are as follows:

- Concrete, conceptual and multisensory research that embraces multi-disciplinary working processes and acknowledges the difficulty and complexity of social engagement and interaction with people.

- An overarching sensory methodology that leads to further critical questions and responses addressing the issues of urban development, socio-spatial belonging and the importance of cultural and historical continuity for the formation of a healthy community.

- Artistic research that constitutes a point of departure for future research coupled with theoretical reflection and practical methodologies.

These points are to be looked at as significant as they emphasise the importance of dialogue between the senses and the rational faculty, and thinking and
feeling; and developing collaborations between residents, designers, planners, architects and other parties involved in urban development. These allow for further multi-sensory research in other cities and suburban areas. Additionally, the project has the potential for future methodological exploration concerned with questions of the production of space/place and the development of infrastructure.

Here are a few limitations that I encountered during my research:

- **Access to construction sites in Pardis Phase 11** proved to be a disappointing obstacle, as the site was a high-security operation. The whole area is under surveillance and is run by the Iranian military and a private Turkish company called Kuzu.

- **Carrying cameras and sound recording equipment in the city** was not without difficulties. People could get suspicious and become nervous if asked to participate in a recorded conversation as there are TV and radio stations operating outside of Iran that are considered as enemies against the Iranian state. Working for any of them can be costly for people. Different police forces can also stop and search if they become suspicious that an individual is carrying camera and sound equipment around in the city. This made me cautious and I had to find different strategies and work spontaneously.

- **As a consequence of the issues mentioned above, as well as cultural boundaries, there is a lack of women’s voices in this research.** It proved to be very difficult to approach women in Pardis Phase 11 and engage them in conversation about their experience of being in that space. This made me more determined to develop the research further and find strategies to tackle the issue in the future.

Ultimately, as an artist and urban researcher I will continue developing the sensory methodologies of my practice for further interrogation of different urban settings. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach carries the potential for a diverse and collaborative production of knowledge, which can be useful and
beneficial in everyday life. I believe that the contemporary urban planning and design of Iranian cities has not been sufficiently researched with a multi-sensory approach. This artistic research, I hope very much, could be considered as a valuable contribution to filling this lacuna.
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Beautiful Rotten Tehran is a multi-sensorial enquiry into a specific location close to the city of Tehran, Iran, called Pardis Phase 11. This is accomplished by employing visual and acoustemological methodologies as research tools for observing and analysing architecture and urban design. In this regard, this research is an attempt to observe, study and analyse the process of urbanisation in Iran, specifically the housing construction in the Pardis Phase 11 suburbs of Tehran. The interest in the sensory dimensions of Pardis Phase 11 serves as the starting point for this multi-sensory research. The project employs sensorial methodologies such as acoustemology and cartography to investigate the area and urban transformations caused by concepts such as 'modernisation', 'development', 'progress' and 'globalisation'. The work evolves through a large collection of media content in the form of field recordings, photographs and collages made at the Pardis Phase 11 site.