Critical Reviews
No. 4
Jan 2026
4

Intervention in Iran's Territorial Landscape

Mehdi Sheybani
Professor, Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, Shahid Beheshti University, Iran.

[Downloaded from jcr-sj.com on 2026-10-07]

[DOI: 10.22034/JCR.1.1.4.1.4.4]

Extended Abstract

Geography functions as the foundational substrate of territory, composed of environmental elements that define scale and context. However, a biome encompasses more than physical geography; it represents the symbiotic dialogue between humans and their land. The "native landscape" emerges from this interaction, where identity is the outcome. While geography provides raw natural factors—such as latitude, solar orientation, and climate—it is the specific human response to these variables that generates distinct cultural identities. In Iran, diverse biomes necessitate diverse responses. Consequently, the identity of the Iranian landscape is a cause-and-effect phenomenon: natural factors act as the cause, necessitating specific adaptations that crystallize into cultural forms as the effect.

To truly comprehend the value of the Iranian landscape, one must look beyond the visible "effects"—historical sites like Eram Garden, Fin Garden, or Golestan Palace—to understand their underlying "causes." The Persian Garden was not merely an abstract design but a multisensory structure built upon three critical pillars: water, plants, and land. The traditional Compartment (kurt-bandi) system, a method of flood irrigation synchronized with land division, dictated the garden's geometry, typically resulting in a bipartite or quadripartite form. This structure was inherently functional, extending the philosophy of fruitfulness and existence from royal palaces into the domestic sphere, where the utility of fruit-bearing trees was paramount.

This garden typology transcended its boundaries to shape the broader urban fab-

Email :sheimash@gmail.com

ric. The domestic courtyard evolved as a microcosm of the garden, serving as both a sanctuary and a functional space. This evolution represented a progression from raw experience to refined cultural knowledge, organizing the spirit of life within the Iranian house. The essential elements—water axes, geometric planting beds, and trees—were retained to mark the passage of seasons and time. Even in modern Iranian architecture, the "essence" of this form persists mentally, if not always spatially, anchoring the resident in a temporal cycle of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. The transition from the traditional garden to the courtyard, and subsequently to public spaces like mosques and schools, demonstrated a sophisticated adaptation to water availability; planting patterns shifted from water-intensive species to drought-tolerant ones based on the specific micro-climate of the site.

Historical Iranian urbanism further demonstrated this systemic sustainability. In cities like Semnan, water distribution systems linked public pools to private alleys and courtyards, creating an "alley-garden" concept that integrated utility with aesthetics. Furthermore, macro-scale planning adhered to strict environmental logic: drought-sensitive agriculture was centralized, surrounded by the urban core, and flanked by drought-resistant zones. This concentric layering ensured resilience against climatic fluctuations and produced a coherent architectural and urban identity.

However, the modern world has disrupted this organic system. Contemporary landscape architecture is often reduced to "site planning" or abstract design, detached from environmental realities and resulting in ephemeral, object-like spaces. True sustainability is neither purely economic nor social; it is context-specific, defined by the critical constraints of a place, such as water scarcity or pollution. A valid "territorial landscape" approach requires identifying the inhibiting and driving factors of an environment—its comparative advantage—before imposing use. Unfortunately, modern development in Iran is characterized by a lack of awareness regarding territorial capacity. Cities like Urmia have expanded over vital garden belts due to flawed policy-making that prioritizes construction over the carrying capacity of the land. Ultimately, the endurance of the Iranian landscape lies in its historical alignment with natural laws, a lesson that contemporary planning must relearn to avoid creating soulless environments that lack resilience and identity.

[Downloaded from jcr-sj.com on 2026-10-07]

[DOI: 10.22034/JCR.1.1.4.1.4.4]

COPYRIGHTS
Copyright for this article is retained bye the authors with publication rights granted to Journal of Critical Reviews (JCR); The Iranian Journal of Critical Studies in Place. This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (https://creativecommons.org/version4/)