White Revolution: Planning Soft Transition to State Socialism

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Abstract: 1963 to 1979 marks a period in the history of Iran when the country went through a massive speedy development, a program that is often referred to as The White (bloodless) Revolution. This revolution was a socio-political transition that had land reforms, urban/rural developments, welfare, women rights, health and education at its core. Albeit, for scholars and involved parties, a sixteen-year program of reform was a megalomaniac endeavor that, in spite of its claims, mainly served the political agendas of the King in relation to local and international Leftist threats. In order to pilot this plan correctly, many efforts were made to question the project and pave a reasonable landing for it.

The ICA 70 or International Congress of Architects in 1970 was one of such effort that invited experts to Iran to collaborate with the ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, as well as the Association of Iranian Architects, in order to tie development plans to the international context. This happened through a process of questioning the relationship between the traditional (national) architecture of Iran and architectural practices abroad. Among the participants were Paul Rudolph, B.Fuller, George Candilis, Otto Hann, Yoshinobu Ashihara, Philip Will Jr, M. Oswald Ungers and Louis Kahn. Four years after ICA70, the second International Congress of Architecture took place in an attempt to discuss the effect of urbanization in Iran and other industrializing countries at a regional level. This round, Moshe Safdie, Josep Lluis Sert, Kenzo Tange and B.K Doshi were additional members. The outcome of this symposium was the "Charter of Habitat Rights," which was edited by the group and presented by the government of Iran to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Vancouver in 1976.

As a result of these congresses, the government of Iran hired many of the mentioned architects as active agents in urban planning reforms during The White Revolution. This paper will mainly focus on semi realized and unrealized projects that were the result of such interactions; projects that are reminiscent of a futuristic vision for a city in transition that ultimately remained on paper because of the Islamic Marxist revolution of 1979. Study of this meticulous planning, however, can reveal the current landscape of jump cut urban developments in Iran.

Keywords: Socialism, Planning, Revolution, Development

Introduction

A tea container, a glass of tea, a wine glass, a glass vase, a glass rosewater sprinkler, a glass lamp base, a glass bowl. All these glass objects are modest domestic elements rendering a colorful and delicate interior of an Iranian home during the reign of Qajar dynasty in late 19th century Iran. Albeit their humble and fragile domestic presence is elevated to a bold statement while being showcased in a museum of glassware in Tehran.

All of a sudden, a forgotten and outdated lifestyle creeps onto a lit stage demanding respect and attention. The object becomes a mediator through which history is told. This history, however, is far from the tea parties and religious rituals of pre-modern Iranian homes.

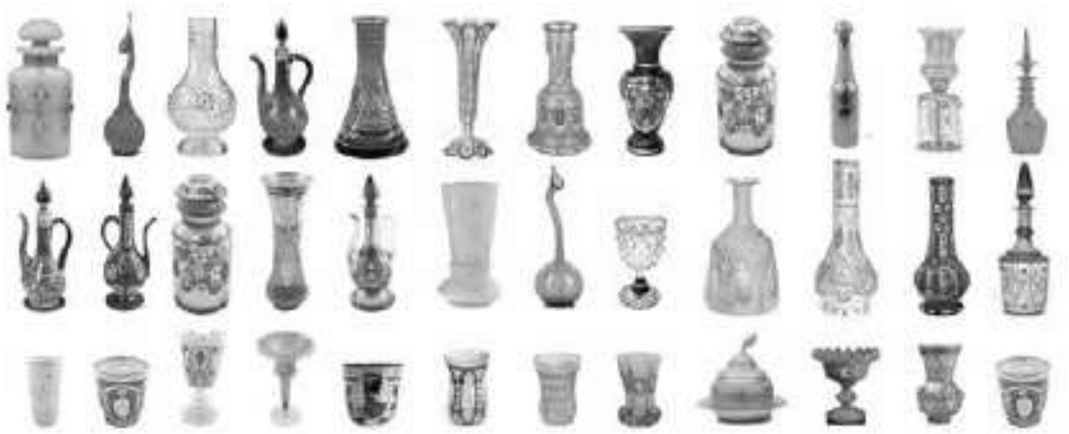


Figure 01: Selected Qajar glassware

This army of glass and ceramic objects sit in a neutrally-gridded black cube that is nothing but a strange oddity in the middle of a Qajari house that once belonged to Ahmad Qavam, a prominent and influential Iranian politician who stood against the nationalization of oil in 1952 — an act that united the National Front, Islamists, Socialists and the Tudeh (mass) parties of Iran in massive demonstrations against Qavam and Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, the king of Iran. Years later, the same house was purchased by Farah Pahlavi's bureau (the Queen's office) in 1976, in order to convert the collective memory of this space into a museum that advocated for the development of a progressive future built upon the shoulders of a glorified past. The glasswares became traditional ambassadors of a lost identity within the modern black cube and floating mushroom pillars of Hans Hollein's design for a museum to be; a museum for a society in transition.

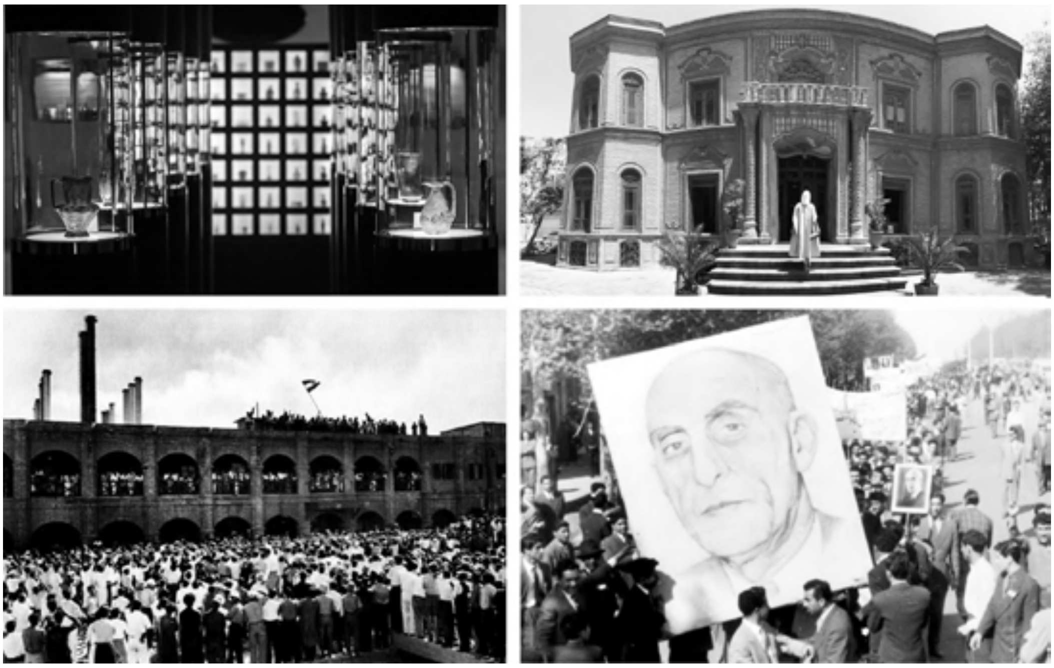


Figure 02 (above left): Interior of Abgineh Msuseum by Hans Hollein. Figure 03 (above right): Exterior of Abgineh Museum, former Qavam residence. Figure 04 (below left): Protests in favor of Nationalization of oil in Iran in 1952. Figure 05 (below right): Iranians carry posters of Mohammad Mosaddeq, the elected Prime Minister of Iran who was removed by the CIA in a coup in 1953.

Nevertheless, 1976 doesn't mark the start of Hollein's involvement with the Royal Commission of the museum. It is the end of a trail that goes back to the second International Congress of Architecture in Iran in 1974, when Hollein sat shoulder to shoulder with Safdi, Candilis, Doshi, Tange, Fuller, Ungers, Pei, Sert, Benevello, and many more renowned international architects in Shiraz, to discuss "the role of architecture and urban planning in industrializing countries." This congress itself was a continuation of the first International Congress of Architecture in Isfahan in 1970 with more names added to the list of architects; a congress where Zavaroni, Quaroni, Mistri, Kahn, Ashihara and many more elaborated on "the interaction of tradition and technology" in Iran. These congresses were unprecedented initiatives that nourished and legitimized the role of architects and planners in the building of a massive state structure that was ostensibly in the people's interest but had the stability of the monarchy against communism at its heart. When the Viennese-American architect Victor Gruen was commissioned to draw up a new master plan for Tehran in 1966, Iranians were busy processing the White Revolution of 1963 (a revolution that was commonly advertised as the peaceful revolution of the king and people). Albeit, the massive superimposition of Gruen's American city on the historical fabric of Tehran laid the ground for a more intuitive and participatory investigation towards the making of not only this "metropolis" but the whole country, a process that required many players to foretell the future of this expanding state.

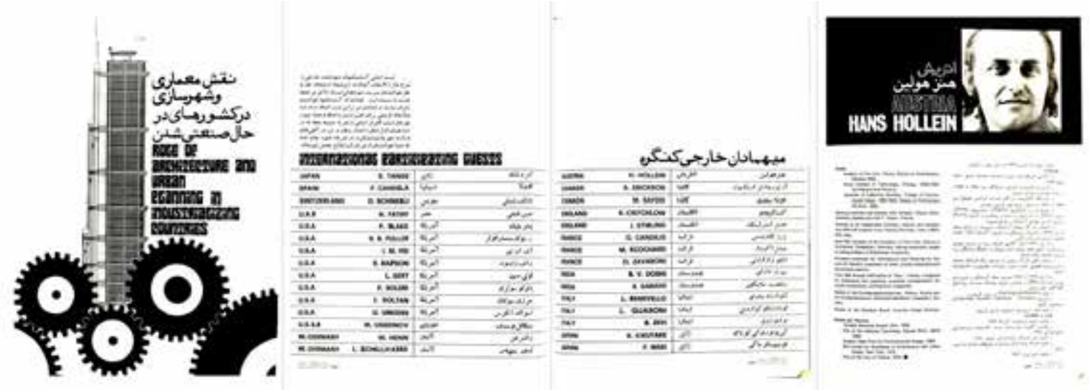

نقش معماری وشهرسازی درکشورهای در حال صنعتی شدن
ROLE OF ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN PLANNING IN INDUSTRIALIZING COUNTRIES
INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATING GUESTS
میهمانان خارجی کنگره
اتریش
هنس هولین
AUSTRIA
HANS HOLLEIN

Figure 06: Pages from Art & Architecture magazine announcing the ICA 74 and the international speakers of the congress and their resumes ©National Library and Archives of Islamic Republic of Iran.

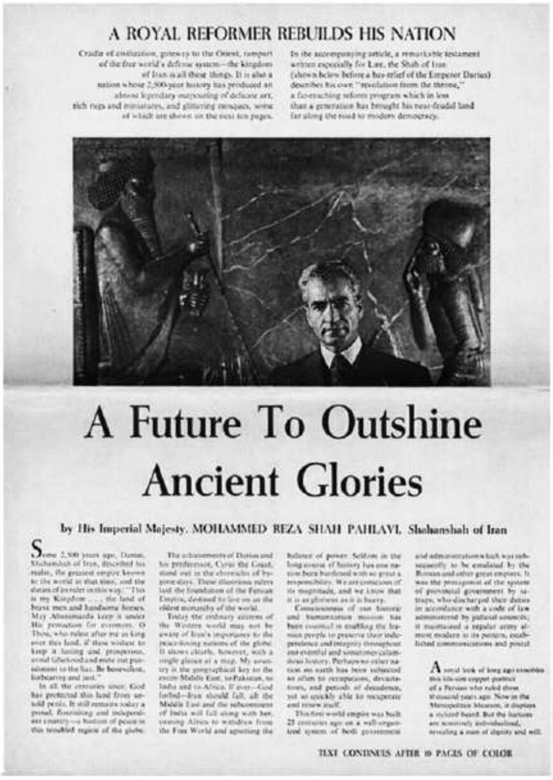
ICA 70
ICA 70
INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
OF ARCHITECTS
ISFAHAN SEP. 1970

Figure 07: Pages from Art & Architecture magazine announcing the ICA 70 and the content of each international speaker's lecture in the congress ©National Library and Archives of Islamic Republic of Iran.

Text format

Between Hollein’s glassware museum and Ahmad Qavam’s residence, our late 19th century brick house is the bearer of another defining story, a story that frames one of the main drivers of the White Revolution”: the story of Iran and Egypt. The brick house with its glorious interior was sold to the Egyptians as the new premises for the embassy of Egypt, and remained in their possession for seven years. Iran-Egypt relations, however, were strained at the time of Abdul Nasser in the 1950s, resulting in the closure of the Egyptian embassy in Iran prior to its conversion into a museum. Egypt, a strong regional ally, turned into the enemy of Iran when Nasser led the overthrow of the monarchy in Egypt in 1952, nationalized the Suez canal, called for pan-Arab unity, and initiated major socialist measures and modernization reforms after his appointment as the president of Egypt. Nasser’s skyrocketing popularity in the Arab world was quite alarming for a king who was an American ally and had his kingdom in the vicinity of a communist country. The rise of the Middle Eastern anti-imperialist movement, along with the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, placed Iran in a tangled relationship that needed a survival plan; a plan that revealed itself through 16 years of rapid developments; A plan that was called a White (bloodless) Revolution.

Politically speaking, the Shah’s position as initiator of the White Revolution was merely as the facilitator of a calculated move against the politics of the Left. Many scholars believe that the White Revolution was intended to address all the issues that could otherwise be exploited by the radical Left in Iran. These reforms were implemented in multiple formats, targeting novel economic concepts as well as social restructuring.



A ROYAL REFORMER REBUILDS HIS NATION

Cradle of civilization, gateway to the Orient, rampart of the free world’s defense system—the kingdom of Iran is all these things. It is also a nation whose 2,500-year history has produced an almost legendary outpouring of delicate art, rich rugs and miniatures, and glittering mosques, some of which are shown on the next ten pages.

In the accompanying article, a remarkable testament written especially for LIFE, the Shah of Iran (shown below before a bas-relief of the Emperor Darius) describes his own “revolution from the throne,” a far-reaching reform program which in less than a generation has brought his near-feudal land far along the road to modern democracy.

A Future To Outshine Ancient Glories

by His Imperial Majesty, MOHAMMED REZA SHAH PAHLAVI, Shahanshah of Iran

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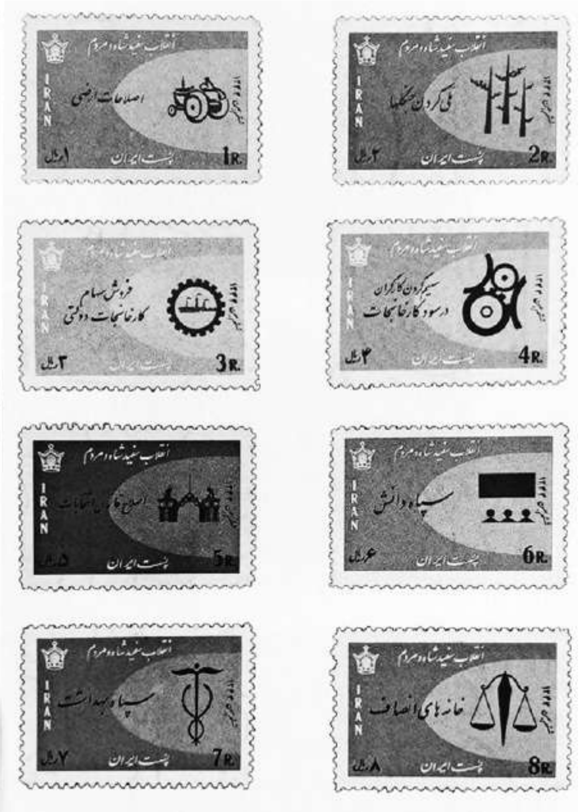


Figure 08 (left): LIFE magazine in 1962. Figure 09 (right): Selection of stamps from Iran in celebration of the White Revolution in 1964 (left to right: land reform, nationalization of forests, sale of shares in state-owned factories, profit sharing for industrial workers, reforming voting rights, literacy corps, public health care, affordable housing). © Cambridge University Press

The re-established political relationship between Iran and the Soviet Union in the early 1950s was a key driver behind the flow of imported American ideals to Iran. Truman’s Point IV Program of economic aid was of particular importance in regards to the Post WWII discourse about international development, and this included

Iran, which sought improvement in such sectors as health care, education, agriculture, housing and urban planning (Karimi 2013). Consequently, the Shah's White Revolution was considered a wise move against a socialist effect and was funded by many international agencies, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the government of the United States. While the early years of this bloodless revolution had its international financial supports, the Shah's development plans benefited from the spiked price of oil later in 1973, when the OPEC countries (including Iran) announced an embargo on petroleum exports — a phenomenon to which the Shah of Iran decisively contributed. Iran's oil revenues rose from $34 million in 1954-55 to $5 billion in 1973-74, and further to $20 billion in 1975-76. In the course of 23 years, oil provided Iran with more than $55 billion (Abrahamian 2018). It is no surprise that this petroleum state, or as some would say, a rentier state, was about to have the superimposition of an American dream city on the narrow streets and alleyways of its capital by the father of shopping mall design, Victor Gruen, in late 1960s. In an interview, Kamran Diba, the architect of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMOCCA) and one of the active members of the two congresses says "The king paid us a visit at TMOCCA to check Noriyuki Haraguchi's oil installation in 1977. Incredulously, he dipped his hands in the pond and touched the oil to know this black volume that is reflecting everybody's image in its sheer darkness is really the "crude oil" upon which his pseudo-American modernized kingdom has taken shape" (Gholipour 2018).

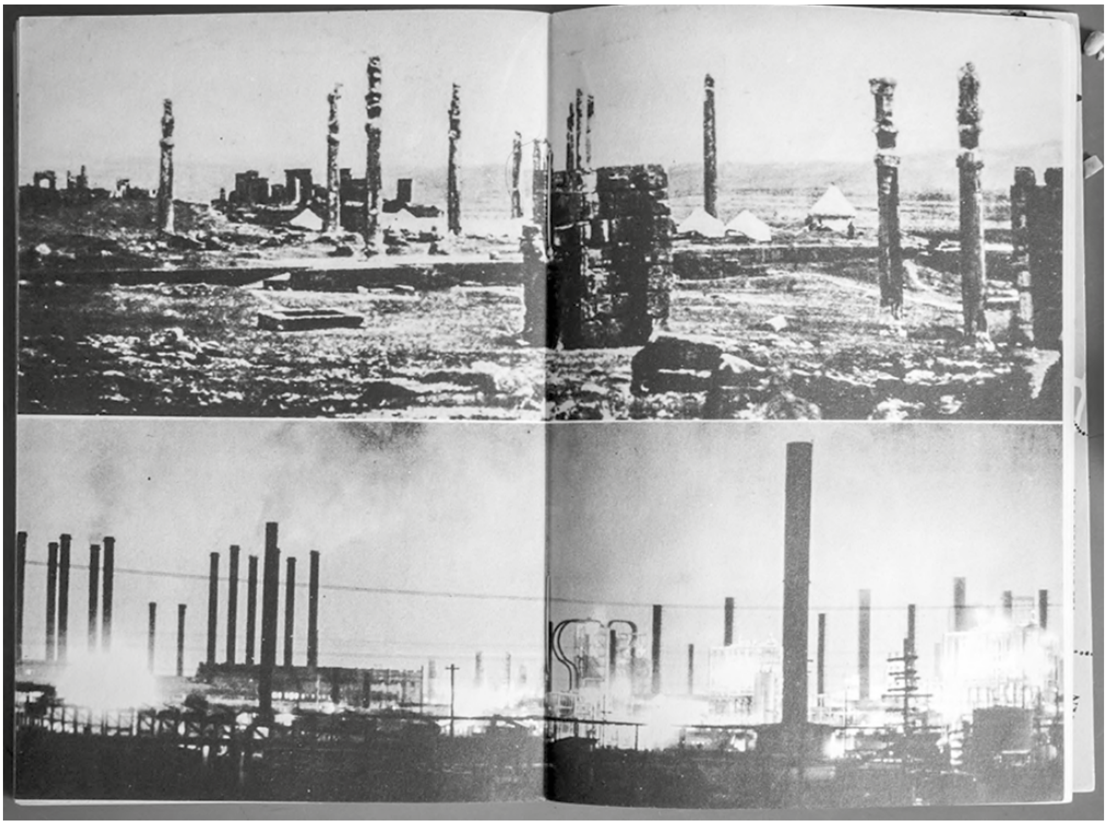


Figure 10: Pages from Petite Planete, a travelogue by Chris Marker during his influential 1950s travels. The image shows the visual resemblance between oil refineries of southern Iran and remains of Persepolis in Shiraz.

The pseudo-American master plan of the capital was the framework for the satellite towns, apartment and office buildings, recreation and healthcare projects, parks, highways, road systems and many more facilities built in and around Tehran in 1970s. Describing Gruen's approach to town planning, Vanstiphout Wouter presents the Tehran master plan as a straight descendant of Howard's garden city movement:

> " The plan is an enormous flowerlike structure, repeating itself inwardly as you come closer. The organic hierarchy of families, neighborhoods, communities, towns, cities and the metropolitan core are held together

by an elegant tracing of highways, embedded in a flowing of parks and other green landscapes. Around the metro core there revolved ten cities, each city consisting of ten towns around the city center and each town consisting of four communities around a town center, with lastly each community consisting of five neighborhoods around the community center … The commission by the Shah of Iran to draw up the Tehran Comprehensive plan gave Gruen the chance to realize his metropolis in the scale and the way it was meant to be. The petro-dollar driven White Revolution provided him with the autocratic power and the ridiculous amounts of money he needed." (Wouter 2006)

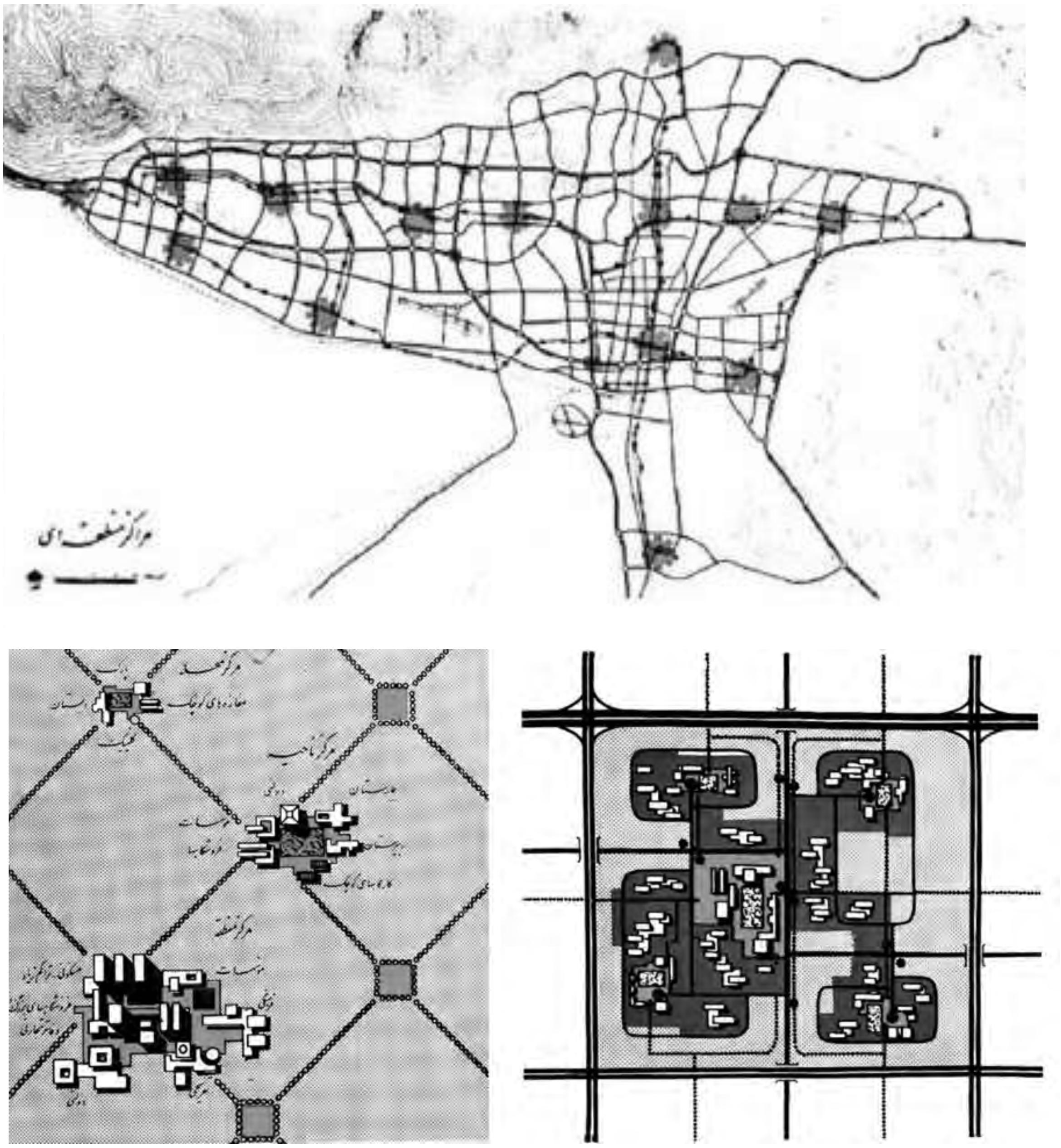
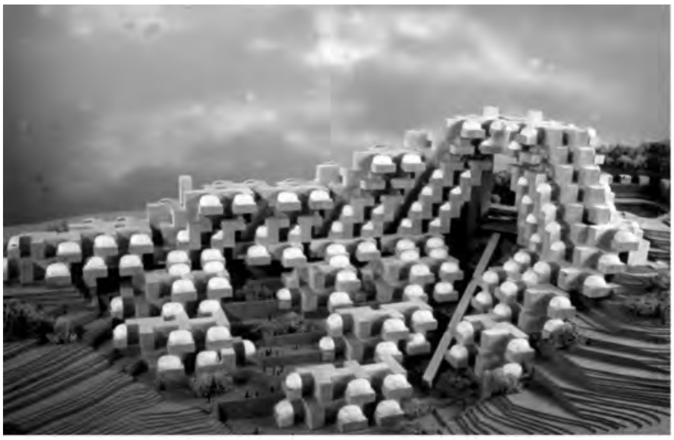
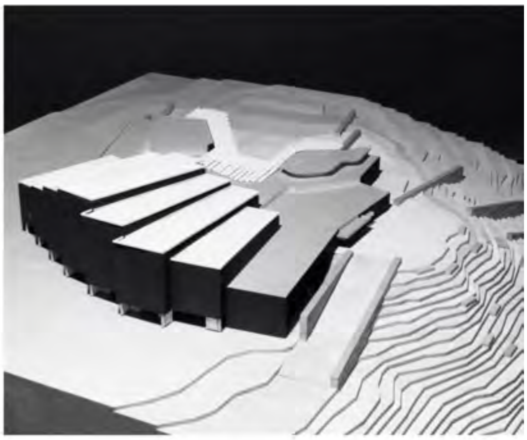
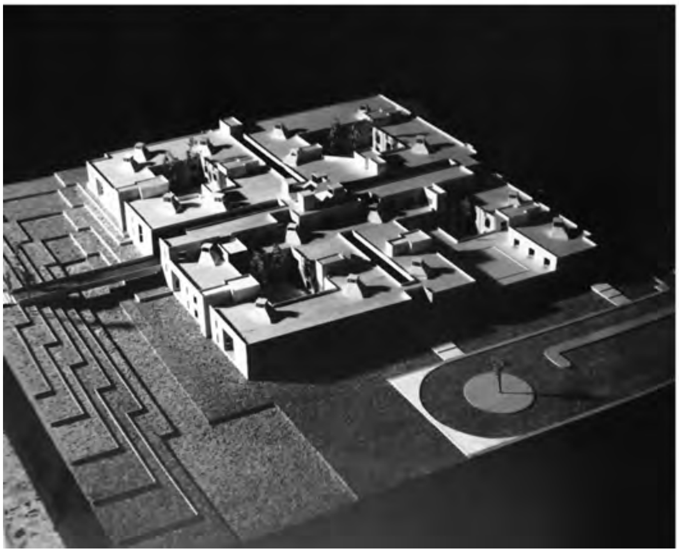


Figure 11: Diagrams from the comprehensive master plan of Tehran by Victor Gruen and Aziz Farmanfarmaian (1966) ©National Library and Archives of Islamic Republic of Iran.

In spite of many great efforts, the story of this master plan, like many other projects, was destined to be left unfinished after the 1979 Revolution in Iran. The initiative, however, became the blueprint for identifying cultural gaps and differences in the field of the built environment and created new projects that were actually the realization of its metropolitan cores and flowing of parks in different parts of Tehran. The collaboration of Victor Gruen and Aziz Farmanfarmaian was the beginning of many collaborations that came out of the 1970 and 1974 International congresses — congresses that set out to rectify and enrich the realization of future plans such as Gruen's in first place. In this way, Iran's history of architecture in the 1970s is fulfilled by certain key commissions that went to leading international architects, such as but not limited to, the Tehran Hotel by Kenzo Tange, the Glassware Museum renovation by Hans Hollein, the Iran Museum of Modern Art in Shiraz by Alvar Aalto, the Imperial Medical Center of Iran by William L. Periera Associates, the Industrial Credit Bank by I. M. Pei & Associates, and Tehran Habitat by Moshe Safdie. In the field of city planning, new development projects were undertaken on a vast scale, including the Shahestan Pahlavi by Louis Kahn, and later, the Llewellyn-Davies International and the Pardisan Environmental Park by Ian McHarg. Needless to say that most projects were under the leadership of Iranian architects working with an international team of professionals.







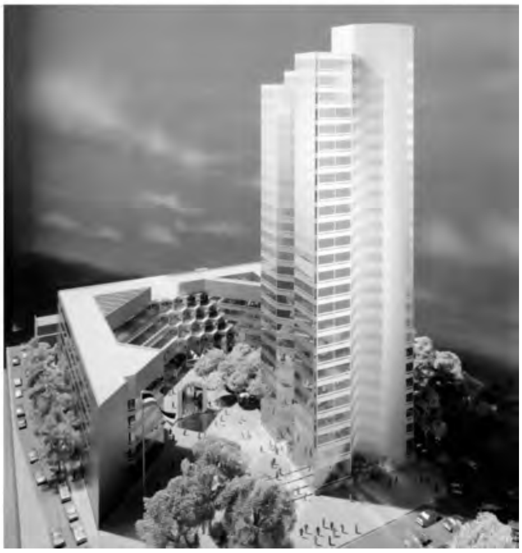


Figure 12 (top left): Tehran Habitat by Moshe Safdie © Safdie Architects, Figure 13 (top right): The Iran Museum of Modern Art in Shiraz by Alvar Aalto © Alvar Aalto Museum, Figure 14 (bottom left): Bu Ali Sina University by The Mandala Collaborative & George Candilis Architects and Planners ©Nader Ardalan, Figure 15 (bottom right): The Industrial Credit Bank by I. M. Pei & Associates © McClelland & Stewart Publication

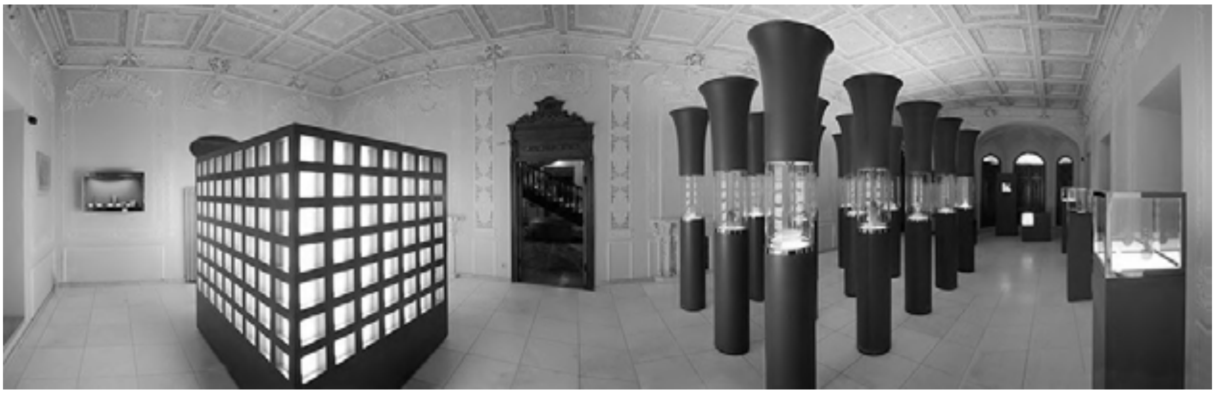


Figure 16: Interior of Abgineh Museum by Hans Hollein.

Yes, the projects were banks and hotels, but they were also houses, hospitals, schools and universities. They were promoting capitalist infrastructures of leisure and entertainment, but also Leftist goals of providing public health, community living and comfort for nuclear families. Even though these reforms were aligned with a global wave of modernizations and industrializations, they had a very particular tone and orientation to them. They were intended to render a triple position: fast-moving yet thoughtful plans that not only would turn Iran into an advanced nation with the help of Western technologies and finances, but to also present an opposing position against those imported Western modernization plans, and above all, to stand against the kind of modernization sponsored by the nouveau riche, oil-centered state economies aka the Arab states (Mohajer 2006). But what they all had in common was the presentation of a a newborn culture that was both modern and Iranian. Therefore, as Peter Avery describes it in his book *Modern Iran*, Iranian culture started to become either the handmaiden of nationalist and rightist propaganda, in which case it ceased to be genuine; or sank into a sullen and shadowy retirement, meaning it was either inarticulate or articulated only in various forms of a rather arid pedantry (Avery 1967).

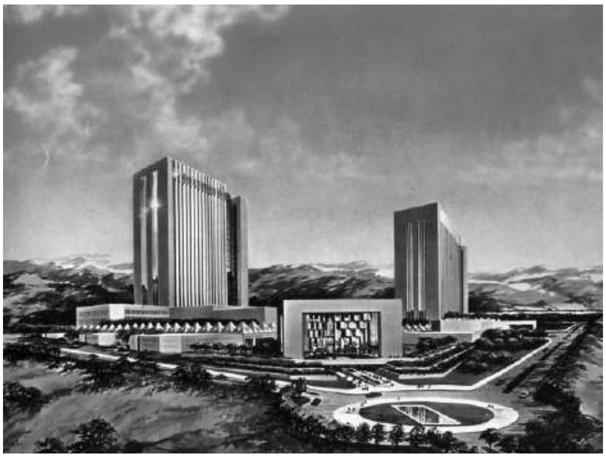


Figure 17: (Left) Imperial Medical Center by William L. Periera Associates ©University of Southern California, on behalf of the USC Libraries Special Collections. Figure 18 (right): Kavar health project

In an attempt to turn culture into a political instrument of power, the Shah established an alternative court and appointed the Queen as its chief advisor. In this way, the Queen, a former student of architecture at the École spéciale d'Architecture in Paris, became the beacon of cultural advocacy; an attempt that transformed itself into many key organizations that were heavily involved in the artistic and architectural development of the country[1]. And this is how architects, both locally and internationally, became active agents in construction of a triplicated plan for a bloodless revolution of the king and his people. But also, they became active agents in the conflict between the two courts: one promoting tenacious political ideas, and the other humanistic and cultural agendas.

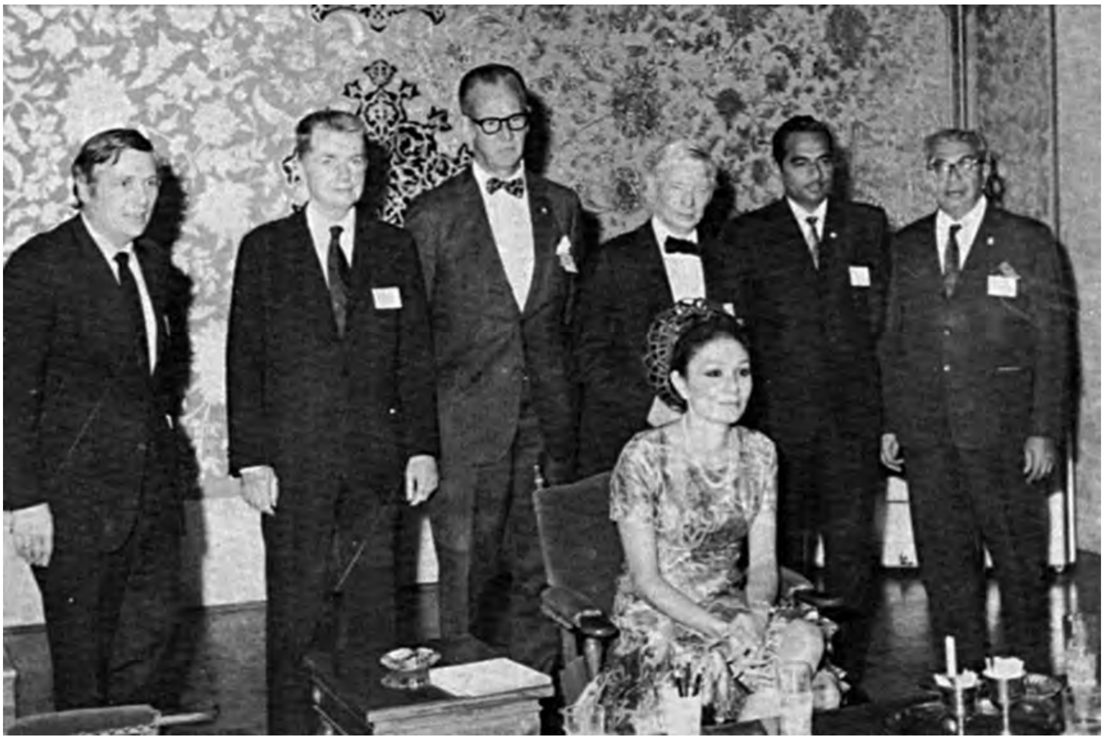


Figure 19: International Congress of Architecture in Isfahan in 1979. The image presents Empress Farah Pahlavi together with guest speakers of ICA70.

In 1976, when under the influence of the Queen, Iran presented the "Charter of Habitat Rights" at the United Nation Conference on Human Settlements in Vancouver, the spark of an uprising was happening in Iran. The Charter was the outcome of CIA74 and was edited by Nader Ardalan, Jose Lluis Sert, Moshe Safdie, George Candilis and B.K Doshi. While the Charter highlighted that the problems of human settlements are not isolated from the social and economic development of their respective countries, and that they cannot be set apart from existing unjust international economic relations⁻, the socio-economic gap between rich and poor was widening among Iranians in Iran. The White Revolution and the escalated oil price raised people's expectations but did not necessarily meet them at the same pace. Three years later, the bloodless revolution of the king and his people was put to an end by the bloody Marxist-Islamist revolution of 1979; a new paradox that has shaped 40-years of troubled domestic and international affairs since then.

Strolls on streets and alleyways of Tehran can be very heartbreaking. This city proves that un-built plans are not only a bunch of lines on a stack of papers that gathers dust every day. These lines are the tangible and intangible scars on the face of the urban scenery. It was not long ago that I first stepped on the Tabiat Pedestrian Bridge, an Agha Khan award-winning project that made it into the news headlines of 2016. The strategic location of the bridge was reminiscent of many moments in the history of the modern and contemporary built environment in Iran. The elevated level of the bridge places the viewer at a height where the upward and outward flow of the city is quite tangible, an experience that has a meaning to those who are aware of the tale behind this magical scenery. Tabiat Bridge is a connection that stitches the city to the beautiful hilly landscape of the Abbas Abad district. This location was first introduced in the famous future master plan of Tehran as a potential site for a new urban city centre. Gruen's designated spot was later named "Shahestan Pahlavi," a grandiose project that was supposed to represented the best of urban developments during the final years of the White Revolution. It was a perfect example of the different paradoxes the revolution presented: a battle between tradition and avant-garde, a battle between artistic production and political statements, a battle between primary and alternative courts — and contrary to what it claimed — not the revolution of a king and his people but rather a battle between the public and the sovereign. The project started as a competition between two of the key speakers at CIA 70 and 74, Louis Kahn and Kenzo Tange, who were supported by the Queen. The two proposals were then combined in a third proposal by Arata Isozaki. The final plan, however, was commissioned to the British office of Llewelyn-Davies International in order to give the king a massive development worth $3 billion with a focal point larger than Red Square in Moscow: an open space that was called the Shah and Nation Square. In 1975, Eric Pace, a New York Times journalist wrote:

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[1] *Queen Farah Pahlavi Foundation, Iran Cultural Foundation* and *High Council of Architecture and Urban Design* are of great importance in regards to Iranian architectural developments during the White Revolution.

> "The Shah was on hand for a ceremony last week to present a 540,000 commemorative gold' plaque that was buried at the site before bulldozers began growling over the surrounding hills, which once were used by the Iranian Army for training. The Shah ordered the city of Teheran to take over the land in 1971.Though the Shah gave no explanation for the decision to highlight the square, the Mayor, in his opening address, stressed the importance of open space and greenery in beautifying the capital." (Pace 1975)

Regardless of all the ups and downs, Shahestan Pahlavi ended up being a megalomaniac project that ended with the massive uprising of the 1979 Revolution. Even though a project like Tabiat Bridge revitalizes the nostalgia for a Shahestan, other corners of the city betray the aftermath of a failed plan in a spatial language. Gruen's master plan, like many other master plans, surpassed the life of its creators. It was meticulous, and well calculated and piloted for execution. Yes, it was a scheme of the Monarchy. Yes, it was a Western invention and, yes, it was doomed to exclusion after the Islamic revolution in 1979. However, it was too useful to be perfectly abandoned.

Given the post war situation of Iran in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this comprehensive plan could be a financial asset because of its exact calculation for the distribution of densities. The plan, therefore, could assist the city in selling off densities to whomever was interested in maximizing their built-up areas. Ignoring the five-year intervals in the expansion plan, the city accelerated the boundaries to the 1991 end-boundary in order to maximize the selling of densities. In this way, the abandoned master plan became a source of income through severe densification of the city (Wouter 2006).

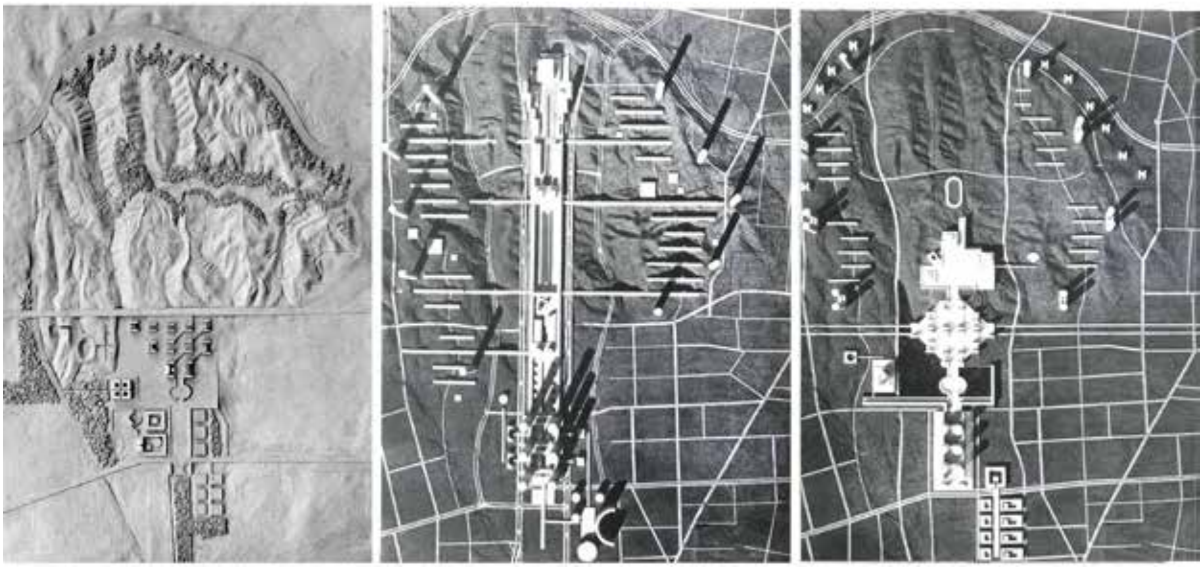
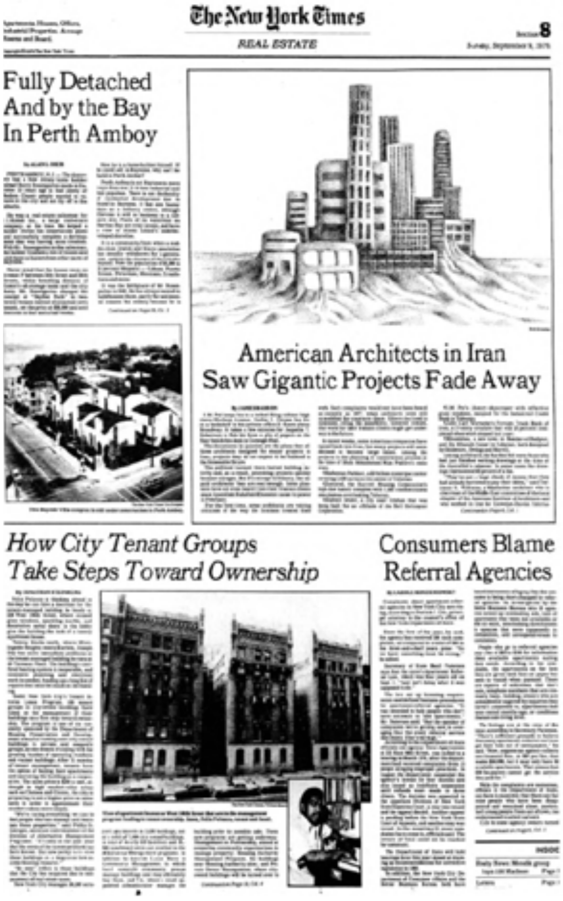


Figure 20: Master plans of Shahestan, from left to right: Louis Kahn’s proposal, Kenzo Tange’s proposal, Arata Isozaki’s proposal. ©Louis I.Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission.



The New York Times

REAL ESTATE

8

Fully Detached And by the Bay In Perth Amboy

American Architects in Iran Saw Gigantic Projects Fade Away

How City Tenant Groups Take Steps Toward Ownership

Consumers Blame Referral Agencies

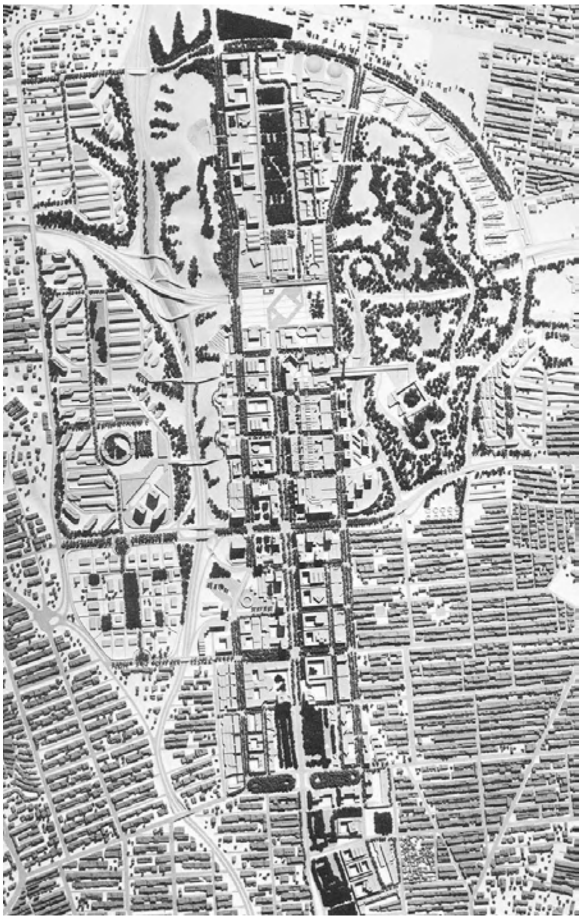


Figure 21 (right): The New York Times, announcing the end of an era, Figure 22 (left): Master plan of Shahestan by Llewelyn-Davies Associates ©Jaquelin T. Robertson

While glimpses of residential or public structures were erected here and there, the executed plan is largely missing the basic principles of its original design: an industrial and modern metropolitan city with Shahestan as its core center; 10 logically-distributed, pivotal urban centers, with elegantly-designed cultural, institutional and recreational buildings, and parks, public spaces and commercial nodes as the hearts of the city. For as much as it is joyful to imagine the city in its original rendered view, and as it was envisioned, it is disturbing to realize that the cityscape of contemporary Tehran can be read as the result of a master plan that has been forced to eat itself (Wouter 2006). Strolls through Tehran, like the story of its modern plan, have always been open ended too. While first steps are nostalgic attempts, the last ones are always left hanging in the air; one wonders where to land them in order to rejigger the jigsaw landscape of an envisioned plan. Could they be among the lush greenery of the McHarg's Pardisan Park? Could it be among the Japanese-style gardens of Tange's hotel or the gigantic plaza of Jacqueline Robertson's Shahestan? Or instead, are they destined to land in haphazardly planned and isolated projects that never manage to define a sense of unity in what we know as "Tehran" today? In the last 50 years, Tehran has faced a revolution, a war, massive migration, multiple natural catastrophes and many environmental threats. The planning of the city has shifted from a collective and international effort to an isolated and domestic one. In the midst of such transformation, the major effort of the post-revolutionary government has always been to (un)make and (un)do all planning agendas of the previous regime. As a result, this metropolis has turned into a handicapped giant that is losing more and more functions day by day. The giant, unquestionably, is a bad version of its original blueprint. It is true! This is a dialectical process whereby a transition strategy has been challenged and morphed and switched to raise a question: how can collective planning envision a trajectory for this city that becomes the base for a transition? A transition that liberates or, perhaps, connects the city from or to its own past?

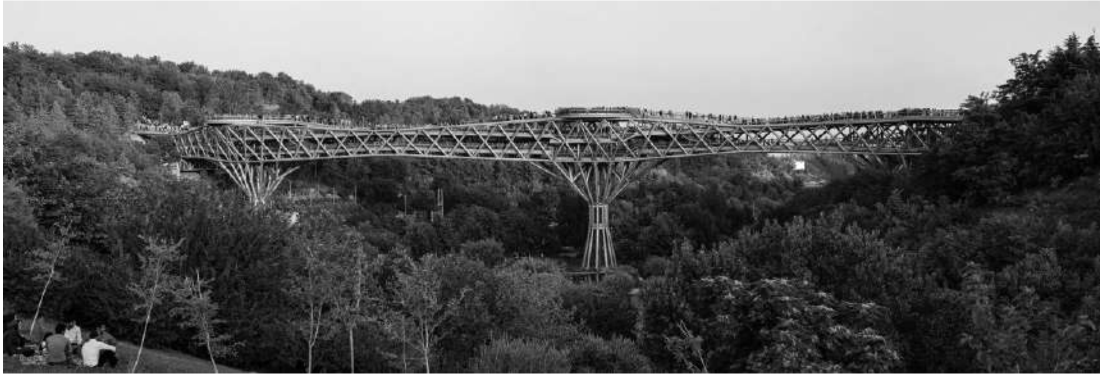


Figure 23: Tabiat bridge, the winner of Aga Khan award in 2016 © Mohammas Hassan Ettefagh

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