

Voice of the Mayor

Pirouz Hanachi, Tehran



**Return to Resources: Revitalizing Tehran's Natural-
Historical Identity**



Pirouz Hanachi

Mayor of Tehran

Professor, College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran

Born 1964, Tehran

Educational Background

Place of Education	Level of Education	Field of Education
University of Tehran	Masters of Art	Architecture
University of Tehran	PhD	Architecture (Urban Restoration)

Work History

Title	Start Date	End Date
Deputy-Dean, College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran	1993	1995
Head of Scientific Department of Restoration of Buildings and Urban Areas (maintenance and development), Faculty of Architecture, University of Tehran	2005	Present
Vice-Minister for Construction Engineering and Buildings, Ministry of Roads and Urban Development	1997	1999
Deputy for Architecture and Urban Affairs, Ministry of Roads and Urban Development	2000	2005
Secretary of High Council of Urban Development and Architecture	2000	2005
President of the Research Institute of Art and Culture, University of Tehran	2006	Present
Vice-President for Architecture and Urban Development; and Secretary of the High Council of Architecture and Urban Development of Iran	2000 2013	2005 2017
Deputy-Mayor of Tehran for Technical and Urban Affairs, Tehran Municipality	2017	2018
Deputy-Mayor of Tehran for Urban Development and Architecture, Tehran Municipality	2018	2018
Mayor of Tehran	2018	Present
Co-President of UCLG	2020	Present
Co-President of Metropolis	2020	Present
Co-President of Mewa	2020	Present

Return to Resources: Revitalizing Tehran's Natural-Historical Identity

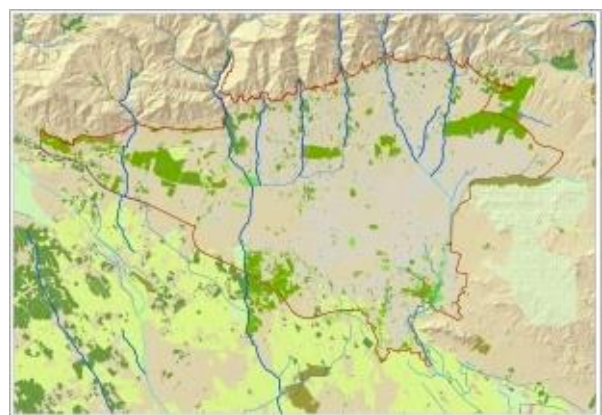
From suburban village to metropolis

Tehran as a city is not very old and its history dates back to less than 500 years ago. However, there has been human settlement in this area for about 3000 years. Before the Safavid era (16th to early 18th century AD), Tehran was a village near the city of Rey. After the selection of Qazvin as the Safavid capital in the 1550s, the village of Tehran gained prominence due to its proximity to Qazvin and grew rapidly. The reasons for the abrupt increase in the importance of the village were its natural resources, suitable climate for living and agriculture as well as its accessibility to important parts of the country. From this point, Tehran has been known as a city rather than a village. The first step in Tehran's transformation into a city was its enclosure with ramparts and 114 towers (this is the number of Surah or chapters in the Quran, the holy book of Muslims) to ensure the security of the city. At that time, the area of the city inside the ramparts was about 400 hectares and a significant part of it consisted of gardens.

Tehran's location between the Alborz Mountains (in the north) and Dasht-e Kavir desert (in the south), as well as two rivers on its eastern and western flanks, results in significant climatic diversity in the city. Until the beginning of the Qajar era (late 18th century), Tehran was so tree-covered and lush that it was described as *Golzar* (flower garden), *Chenarestan* (city of sycamores) and *Behesht-e Paryan* (angel's paradise). Due to the mild climate and the existence of a large number of small and large streams in the area, the sycamore has been the dominant tree species in Tehran and the city has been known as the city of sycamores throughout history. Pietro Della Valle, the Italian traveler and writer, wrote in his travelogue four hundred years ago that Istanbul was known as *Sarvestan* (city of cedars) and Tehran as *Chenarestan* (city of sycamores).



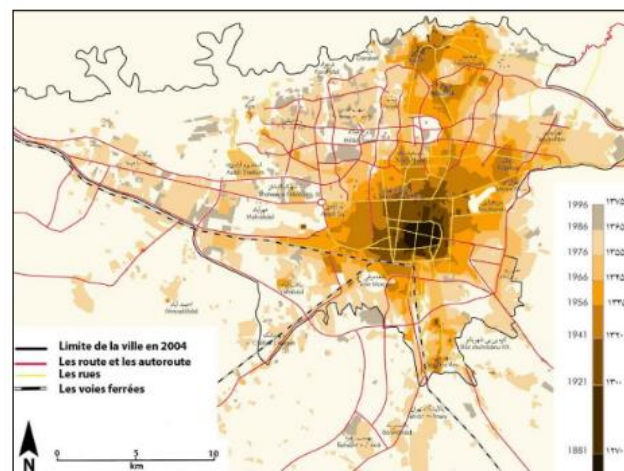
Valiasr Street with old sycamores



Natural geography of Tehran

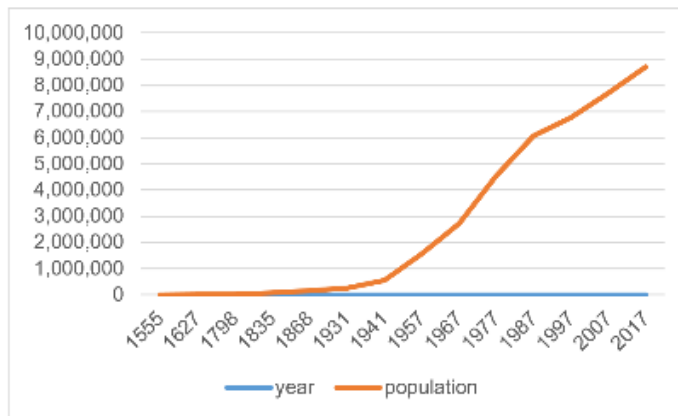
At the beginning of the Qajar era, in 1796, Tehran, due to its strategic location and other advantages, had been chosen as the capital of Iran and entered a new phase of development; from the 1850s, following the development of the city and the creation of new urban functions, new neighborhoods were formed outside the city ramparts, and embassies, residences of ambassadors and courtiers as well as palaces were also built on vacant lots and gardens outside the city ramparts. In 1867, by order of Nasser al-Din Shah Qajar, the old ramparts of the city were demolished and new wider ramparts designed and built in the Baroque style. During this period, the area of the city reached 2000 hectares and many gardens and agricultural acreages were destroyed to make way for new construction.

With the beginning of the Pahlavi era in 1925, efforts intensified for the transformation of Tehran into a modern city, including: demolition of the city ramparts, formation of new neighborhoods, imposition of a regular street network on the organic fabric of the city, and the creation of administrative, industrial, commercial and urban service centers (which attracted more people from other cities and villages to Tehran). These urban transformations were largely accompanied by the destruction of the city's cultural and natural assets. For example, the expansion of the city into the northern green foothills, which became more and more attractive to the wealthy class, on the one hand damaged the natural value of the northern parts and on the other hand led the historic part of the city to be considered "old" and "outdated".



Expansion of Tehran over time

After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, migration to Tehran intensified and led to the further physical and demographic growth of the city in the following decades. Today, with an area of 73,000 hectares, Tehran has become a metropolis hosting more than 12 million people during the day and accommodating more than 8.5 million people at night.



Demographic change in Tehran

Migration to Tehran began on its selection as capital by the first Qajar king and has continued since. Therefore, Tehran can be considered "little Iran"; various groups from different regions of Iran have settled in it and each group, with its different cultural, social and linguistic characteristics, has played a specific role in the formation of Tehran today.

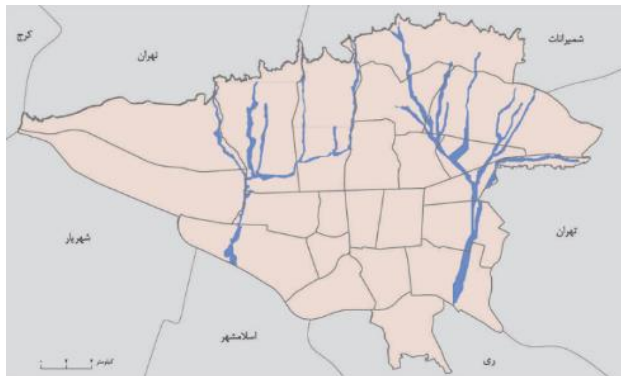
As a result of these migrations, the area of Tehran has increased more than 15 times in the last hundred years. Population growth and "urban sprawl", especially in recent decades, have caused many problems in the city. In the process of the rapid and unbalanced expansion of Tehran, the natural assets of the city have faced destructive changes, the natural life of the city has been endangered and the lives of citizens have been affected by many problems. In addition, low-quality and incompatible construction, changes to housing patterns, the weakening of social relations in neighborhoods, the destruction of valuable buildings, the increasing number of cars, alongside heavy traffic and air pollution are among the acute problems of the Tehran metropolis.

In each period, Tehran city managers have sought to implement measures to meet the basic needs of citizens. In previous periods, due to the need for urban infrastructure, the municipality focused on large-scale construction projects such as highways, bridges, tunnels, as well as urban renewal projects. With the relative satisfaction of these needs, in the current period of urban management, I and my colleagues in the Tehran Municipality have set the goal of improving the quality of life of all citizens and have chosen the slogan "Tehran, A City for All" as the basis of our actions. At the same time, we have tried to preserve and revitalize the city's declining natural, historical and cultural assets. These efforts can be described under the framework of "Return to roots and resources", which I will explain in the key points following.

Revitalizing the lost natural identity of the city

In the past, the plain on which Tehran is located has enjoyed rich and diverse water sources, making the city green. The gardens, foothills and rivers around Tehran have always provided the city with breathing space and recreation areas for residents. However, the expansion of Tehran has caused serious damage to the natural structure of the city and created several problems. In recent years, following the

shift in the perspective of Tehran's urban management team and increased public awareness of the value of the environment, some programs have been developed to restore the link between the city and nature.

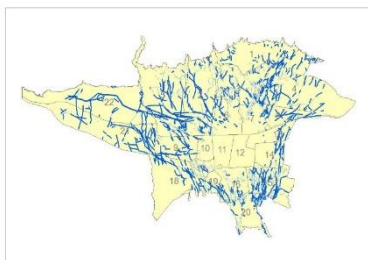


River valleys of Tehran



Creation of Nahjolbalaqeh park in Farahzad river valley

First, revitalizing the river valleys of Tehran: In Tehran, the paths of the seven river valleys that transfer water from the northern foothills to the southern parts of the city have created green areas, a pleasant environment and a beautiful landscape. However, the construction of highways in the past decades, along with interventions to these river valleys (including the construction of concrete beds and walls, canalization and changes to rivers' paths), has in some cases disrupted their operation and created environmental problems. Since 2007, when Tehran's Third Comprehensive Plan recognized these river valleys as valuable environmental zones, the municipality of Tehran began preparing a strategic plan for river valleys which it launched in 2012. The results of this program have been implemented in a river valley named Farahzad as a pilot project, with the aim of creating a promenade and improving the landscape along the river.



Qanats in Tehran



Irrigation of green spaces with qanats



One of the revived qanats of Tehran

Second, the rehabilitation of qanats: In addition to rivers created by rainwater, Tehran is also endowed with groundwater resources. The people of this region have been able to access groundwater by using

qanats and transferring it to the surface for various uses including historically the main city water supply. With the advent of pipe networks in the 1950s, the role of qanats in Tehran was gradually weakened and many were abandoned. In the last few decades, due to the expansion of the city and the destruction of gardens and agricultural land for new construction, the qanats has intensified. Additionally, industrial projects have often taken place without consideration of qanat paths, blocking and drying many of them up. As a result, numerous old trees in Tehran that were irrigated by qanats have died. In recent years, Tehran Municipality has decided to rehabilitate a number of qanats in order to revive the city's identity, preserve traditional technology and introduce it to new generations, as well as make use of the available groundwater. In fact, a large number of dredged qanats have been repaired and rehabilitated already, and a large part of the city's green space is irrigated using water from qanats.



The historical garden and mansion of Vosough ol-Dowleh, transformed into a public space, according to the Iranian garden pattern

Abqari Garden, turned into a public park, using the Iranian garden pattern

Third, protection of city gardens: In order to protect gardens as the natural heritage of the city and prevent them from degradation, Tehran Municipality has purchased about 90 gardens in recent years and turned them into public green spaces. Many of these gardens, in addition to their natural value, have historical features and include historical buildings as well. Tehran Municipality has put the protection and rehabilitation of these gardens along with the restoration of the buildings located in them on its agenda.



Participation of Tehran Municipality personnel in car-free Tuesday A "Bi-doud" (fume-free) smart bicycle station

Fourth, bicycles and clean air: Tehran has expanded in recent decades by giving priority to cars. In order to reduce citizens' dependence on personal vehicles and reduce air pollution, Tehran Municipality has promoted and encouraged cycling in the city in recent years and emphasized the "human-centered" instead of "car-centered" functionality of the city. For this purpose, smart shared bicycles called "*Bi-doud* (fume-free)" have been provided for citizens' use and several stations have been created for these bicycles in the city. In addition, Tuesdays are designated as car-free days, and to encourage citizens to use bicycles, I cycle from home to my office every Tuesday.

Heritage conservation: Towards the revitalization of a bicentennial capital

The city of Tehran has housed valuable buildings and institutions for centuries. Numerous residential, religious, educational and industrial buildings, as well as urban facilities, streets, squares, gardens and many other elements make Tehran a city rich in heritage. Many of these assets are protected by the public sector and some by civil society stakeholders. So far, more than 300 historical monuments in Tehran have been registered as national heritage; however, the rapid expansion of the city, new construction, the desire for modernity, and property speculation have led to the destruction of many valuable architectural elements dating from up to two centuries ago. The Tehran Municipality has been taking stronger measures to promote heritage conservation since 2018. These measures include strategic programs, executive plans, research and the implementation of regulations, which are carried out in coordination with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage. In addition, in recent years, Tehran Municipality has held seminars, workshops, training programs and various events that have played a significant role in increasing heritage awareness and sensitivity among managers, professionals and the public. So far, Tehran Municipality has succeeded in stopping the process of the destruction of historic buildings to a considerable extent and instigated the process of restoring and protecting them. To this end, the municipality has purchased more than 80 valuable buildings, many of which have been restored and repurposed.



Restoration of Minayi house and its transformation into a cultural site



Renovation of Ettehadieh house and garden, built during the Qajar period



Revitalization of Lalehzar Street, as a symbol of modern Tehran



The construction of the City Hall on the location of Tehran's first municipality building in the Qajar era



Improvement of national garden as one of the historical squares of Tehran

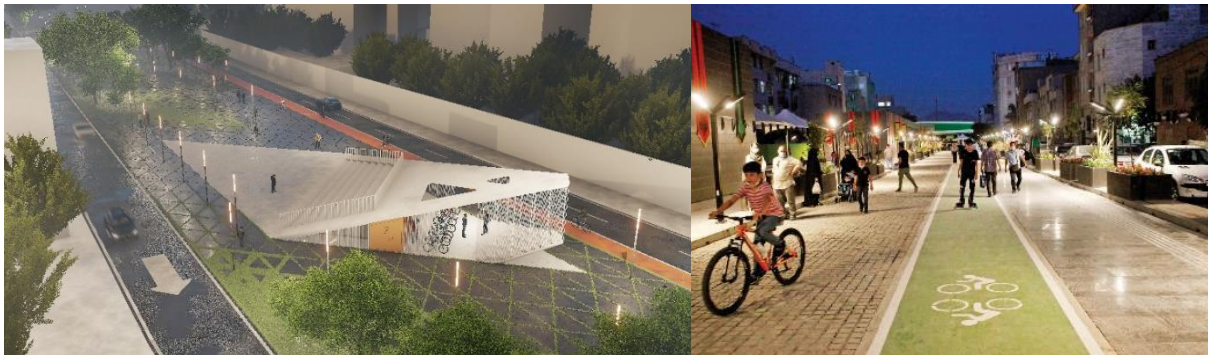


Reconstruction of destroyed gates of Tehran

The social life: return to the Iranian city

With the aim of improving the quality of urban life and citizens' health as well as increasing social interactions, in recent years the municipality of Tehran has defined the creation of public spaces as one of its priorities. These urban spaces are planned and implemented in the two scopes of city and neighborhood.

First, urban plazas: In the past, Iranian cities had squares (*meydan*) that were places where activities such as social interactions, economic exchanges, military parades, religious, recreational and social ceremonies took place. These squares were one of the most important elements in the structure of cities and were considered the main urban spaces. However, with the beginning of modernization in Iranian cities and the arrival of cars from the end of the Qajar era, the function of the squares also changed from a space for social interactions and various economic and social activities to a roundabout for turning vehicles. Due to the dominance of vehicle movement in the squares, these spaces lost their social role in urban life to the extent that today it can be said that squares are more of a traffic element than an urban space. In such circumstances and due to the increase in the population of Tehran, the existence of different cultural, social, sex and age groups in the city, there is a need for public urban spaces that provide a platform for social interaction. Therefore, in recent years, Tehran Municipality has implemented a program entitled "urban plazas" and tried to revive the concept and role of the square by emphasizing pedestrian movement and creating places for citizens to walk. Two notable examples of these projects are "Amirkabir Plaza" and the "Sharbagh", both of which have been implemented in abandoned urban areas.



Execution of the 9 km Sharbagh project, on the site of a former railway line Amirkabir Plaza

Additionally, the second space for invigorating public interactions is neighborhoods. In the past, neighborhood life was a significant part of the daily lives of residents, and social relations and the participation of residents in neighborhood management were key characteristics of Iranian cities. However, today, fundamental changes have taken place in neighborhoods and affected neighborhood life. In Tehran, numerous factors have contributed to the changes in the old neighborhoods; including:

- Changed shape and function of neighborhoods due to the prevalence of car use, reducing the importance of pedestrian movement;

- Decreased interactions and social relationships due to changes in lifestyle, employment patterns and housing patterns;
- Weakened sense of belonging to place and, as a result, reduction in the responsibility taken for and participation of residents in neighborhood affairs.

Although it is neither possible nor logical to return to the style of the old neighborhoods of Tehran, in order to strengthen the concept and function of the neighborhood, revive neighborhood life and address the social gaps in modern life, Tehran Municipality has taken a "neighborhood-centered approach" in recent years. For this reason, more than 80 projects have been carried out with the goal of creating public spaces in neighborhoods, providing local services and improving the environmental quality of neighborhoods. What is important regarding these projects is the participatory approach employed in decision-making, planning, design, implementation and management, which strengthens the sense of belonging to place and increases the interactions between the residents of the neighborhoods. Among these, we can mention the projects of creating neighborhood centers, pocket parks, urban agriculture and beautification of alleys.



Derakhshan neighborhood center



Shirin Dokht neighborhood center



Regeneration of Da'vati street



Participatory neighborhood regeneration

Conclusion

The geographical location of Tehran in Iran and its climatic and natural features have caused this city to remain the capital of the country for two hundred years; despite the problems caused by population growth, proposals to reassign the capital city have not been realized. Tehran can be considered a unique place that has transformed, over four centuries, from a small village to a metropolis with a population of more than 8.5 million people of different ethnicities and cultures. Today's citizens of Tehran can say they are "from small Iran". For these residents, the construction of streets, bridges, highways and infrastructure is no longer enough; rather, the population seeks to improve the quality of urban life. This is an issue that has attracted the attention of city managers in recent years and has marked a new era of urban management in Tehran. That is why we have put the slogan "Tehran, A City for All" on our agenda and are working to realize it. My colleagues and I aim to establish social justice through the equitable distribution of urban resources, services and infrastructure for the benefit of all citizens in the urban management of Tehran. So far, many measures have been taken with the aim of overcoming the problems of the contemporary metropolis and improving the quality of citizens' lives. Today I have explained a few of the efforts of Tehran Municipality to protect the natural and historical value and assets as well as revive the lost identity of this city. It is hoped that in future, with continued effort and by learning from the successes of the world's metropolises, we will be able to take more effective steps towards the achievement of our goals.