



This publication collects the results of the Call for Visions |24
Gardens: Regeneration cells in the contemporary cities organized by Iran_Lab



iran_lab
Department PDTA Internationalization Unit



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

CALL FOR VISIONS | 24

Gardens: Regeneration cells in the contemporary cities

The results

Jury

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CALL FOR VISIONS | 24

THE RESULTS

GARDENS: REGENERATION CELLS IN THE CONTEMPORARY CITIES

edited by

ALESSANDRA DE CESARIS





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Iran-Lab | Shared Research and Education

Sapienza PDTA Internationalisation Unit

Scientific responsible

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IRAN_LAB

Relations and cultural exchanges between the Iranian Schools of Architecture and the Faculty of Architecture at Sapienza University have a long tradition. A large number of professors and scholars, who have left important studies on urban planning and architecture in Islamic territories, have trained within our school. Our libraries preserve a large number of specialised volumes on Islamic architecture and urbanism that constitute an important and valuable reference for students and researchers from both countries. Our degree courses welcome many students every year, some of whom continue their academic training in the doctorate; as a whole, every year they produce studies and works of considerable interest, which are not always valued and whose traces are often lost.

IranLab, in keeping with the PDTA Department's cultural project, is part of this strand of cultural exchanges between scholars, researchers, PhD students and students in the fields of design, technology and urban regeneration, with the aim of coordinating, directing and enhancing research and studies on Iranian architecture, experimenting, where possible, with forms of contamination between the two cultures.

OBJECTIVES

Iran_Lab aims to:

- Carry out study, research and training activities in the field of Architecture and related disciplines, with regard to the promotion, development and dissemination of Iranian architectural culture with particular regard to the relationship between Italian and Iranian culture.
- Coordinate the studies and researches of the students of the three-year and master's degree courses of the various degree courses that pertain to the department, as well as the theses and researches of the doctoral students that have Iranian architecture as their subject.
- Systematise the knowledge and know-how of Iranian students and researchers in a data archive.
- Experiment ways of contamination/integration between

specific knowledge on Persian architectural culture and our methodologies of analysis and research.

- Promote and organise, within the framework of the Internationalisation Unit's activities, national and international meetings in the form of seminars, study days, conferences.
- Coordinate its activities with the teaching and research programmes of the University and other institutions through special agreements.
- Encourage initiatives aimed at defining agreements and conventions with public and private organisations, for the dissemination of studies and projects related to architectural production and related disciplines, and encourage the establishment of joint master's degrees with Iranian universities;

FIELDS OF INTERESTS

Cultural Heritage

- Iran is a country with an immense architectural and cultural heritage. A heritage that concerns as much the material aspects from works of art to systems of objects as the intangible aspects. Preservation and valorisation operations are therefore a priority objective, operations that are able to foreground a reflection on the future of these assets, both tangible and intangible, and know how to correctly interpret the relations between the individual asset and the territorial and/or urban context in which it is located.
- Iran is a country with a cultural and material heritage that is both rich and less invested in mass tourism. This represents an opportunity not only for the wealth of its cultural heritage but also for the possibility of setting up a virtuous system of sustainable tourism capable of regenerating the assets present in the territory (network of caravanserais, minor villages, etc.).

Urban Regeneration

- The regeneration of suburbs built according to the schemes of the Modern Movement, totally unsuitable for housing the social classes for which they were intended at the time (lack of open spaces and gardens).
- The search today for the modernisation of certain aspects of traditional Iranian domestic space, (aspects that have fallen into oblivion due to too rapid a modernisation of living spaces). A modernisation that fatally has to confront the cost of land, with problems of building density.
- Research into the definition of new types of public space that are able to meet the needs of today after the period

of the Revolution that saw public space retreat into (more protected) private space.

- The role of the qanat network in the regeneration of densely built-up tissue.

Green Building Approach, Green City Approach

The Persian architectural tradition boasts a heritage of passive energy systems for air conditioning that deserves to be reinterpreted in the light of contemporary requirements.

Design and Exhibit Design

In this area, study and research activities concern the history of decorative arts, handicrafts, the ceramic tradition, and the many aspects of contemporary Iranian design: product, graphic and multimedia, exhibit design in particular exhibition and museum spaces, and design for public space. In fact, there is a young generation of architects in Iran that was formed after the Revolution in search of ways to reinterpret elements of the architectural tradition with newly produced designs and materials in a contemporary key, without lapsing into nostalgic formulas.

CALL FOR VISIONS | 24

GARDENS: REGENERATION CELLS IN THE CONTEMPORARY CITY

- How the garden can be reinterpreted today to meet the needs of contemporary society?
- Can the garden represent an element of regeneration in the dense built fabric of the city?
- Can the garden become the bearer of ecological demands? In what form?
- What role to give to the fence? Does it have to disappear? Can it become three-dimensional and accommodate services?
- Can the garden detach itself from the ground? How

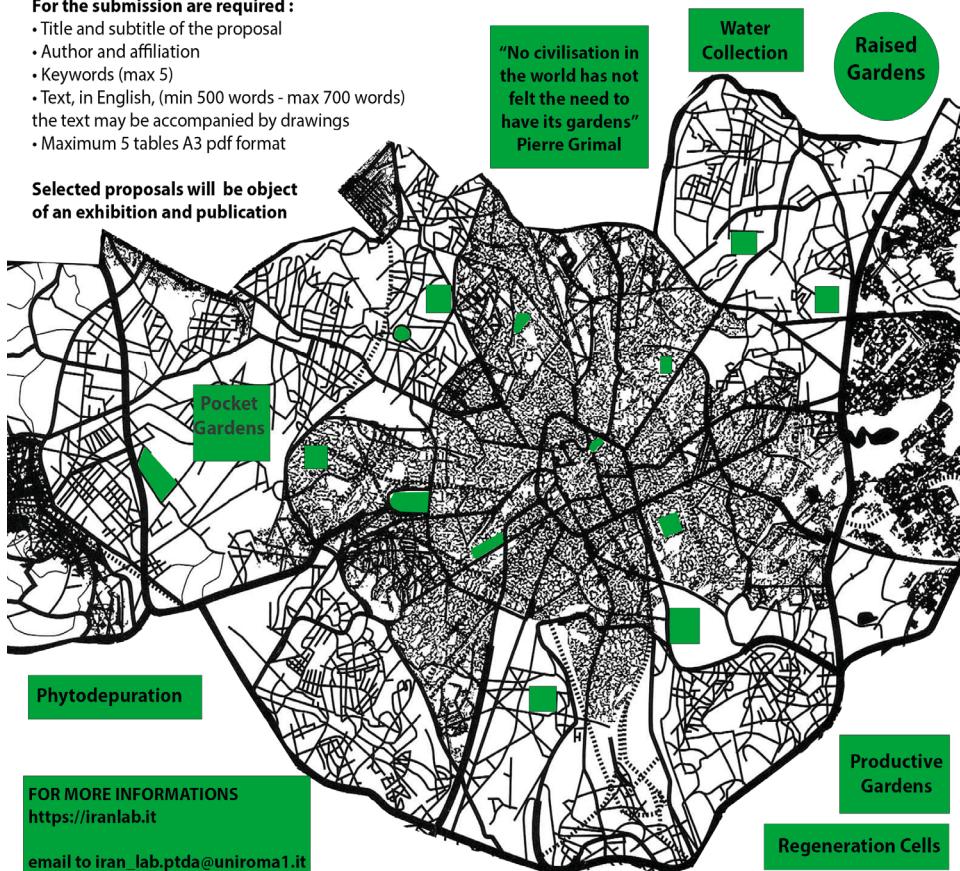
INFO

Proposals should be sent to the email address iran_lab.ptda@uniroma1.it by no later than 30.7.24

For the submission are required :

- Title and subtitle of the proposal
- Author and affiliation
- Keywords (max 5)
- Text, in English, (min 500 words - max 700 words)
the text may be accompanied by drawings
- Maximum 5 tables A3 pdf format

Selected proposals will be object
of an exhibition and publication



FOR MORE INFORMATIONS

<https://iranlab.it>

email to iran_lab.ptda@uniroma1.it

Scientific Committee: Saggiad Behrooz, Roberto Cherubini, Federica Dal Falco, Alessandra De Cesaris, Elham K. Hassani, Hassan Osanloo, Irene Poli, Laura Ricci, Fabrizio Tucci

IRAN_LAB**Unità per l'Internazionalizzazione PDTA Sapienza****Call for Visions|24****GARDENS: REGENERATION CELLS IN THE CONTEMPORARY CITY**

No civilizations in the world has not felt the needs to have its gardens

Pierre Grimal

The call is the second initiative of Iran_Lab|Shared Research and Teaching (scientific coordinator A. De Cesaris) created in December 2022 within the Internationalization Unit (scientific coordinator prof. Federica Dal Falco) of the PDTA Department, Sapienza University of Rome.

This second call is part of the debate and experimentations of new forms and figurations of actions for the regeneration of the contemporary city. In particular, visions capable to reinterpret the typology of garden in order to provide sustainable answers to the new needs of contemporary urban life

Call for Visions is addressed to all students, architects, artists and designers who intend to bring innovation in the theme of gardens with reference to the reality of our contemporary cities.

We ask visions, ideas, even visionary solutions.

Questions

- How the garden can be reinterpreted today to meet the needs of contemporary society
- Can the garden, due to its small size compared to parks, represent an element of regeneration in the dense building fabric of the consolidated city??
- Can the garden become the bearer of ecological demands? In what manner?
- What role to give to the fence? Does it have to disappear? Can it become three-dimensional and accommodate services?
- Can the garden detach itself from the ground? How?

Keywords

Empty spaces | Regeneration Cells | Phytodepuration| Water Collection| Hydroinfrastructures | Multi-tasking Gardens|Raised Gardens | Productive Gardens |Pocket Gardens

FOR MORE INFORMATIONS

<https://www.iranolab.it/>

email to iran_lab.ptda@uniroma1.it

INFO

Submissions to the call should include text and images that will be subjected to a jury.

Proposals should be sent to the email address iran_lab.ptda@uniroma1.it

by no later than 30 July 2024

For the submission are required :

- Title and subtitle of the proposal
- Author and affiliation
- Keywords (max 5)
- Text, in English, (min 500 words - max 700 words). The text may be accompanied by drawings
- Maximum 5 tables A3 pdf format

Authors of selected proposals will later be asked to send the material in 300 dpi tiff format for an exhibition and a publication.

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Saggiad Behrooz, Roberto Cherubini, Federica Dal Falco, Alessandra De Cesaris, Elham K. Hassani, Hassan Osanloo, Irene Poli, Laura Ricci, Fabrizio Tucci.

THE GARDEN AS AN ELEMENT OF REGENERATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY CITY

BRIEF GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FROM JURY

Vision Call's Importance and Iran_Lab's Value

John J. Parman

Several years ago, Dr. Elham K. Hassani asked me to be an editorial advisor to Iran_Lab's books series on its Vision Call ideas competitions, which she coordinated in concert with Iran_Lab's Director, Professor Alessandra De Cesaris. My involvement has given me a working familiarity with these competitions and some knowledge of Iran_Lab, a research unit within La Sapienza University of Rome. In this brief essay, I want to convey my admiration for these accomplishments and my sense of their importance and value.

Iran has an especially rich tradition of building architecture and city-making. This tradition came down to the modern era as the work of evolving work of generations of master builders, setting out the building types and patterns of town-making. Their work was reflected in the vernacular, the two together creating a tangible legacy that is there for contemporary architects and city planners to draw on. As Dr. Hassani documented in a recent book on Persian Architecture, elements of this tradition are applicable to current conditions. Indeed, their sustainable principles persist today. (Hassani, 2025)

In parallel with many other countries, Iran's traditional sense of the organization of human settlement was disrupted in the postwar era by the introduction of Western modernist ideas of how this is done. As a result, Tehran and other cities in Iran are a mix of postwar regeneration at a mass or urban scale, and efforts to preserve historic districts and infuse or temper modernist tropes with traditional forms and elements. To their credit, the Vision Call competitions highlight the need today for a creative synthesis.

Such a synthesis is timely because Iran falls into the hot, arid climate zone that is a worldwide condition, shared by desert metropolises like Phoenix, Arizona, that are grappling with a similar collision between postwar modernist growth and the realities of climate change. Central Asian traditions are better known in Phoenix than its own indigenous ones, as recent projects there show (Meunier, 2017; Buckley, 2025)

Iran_Lab has made desert urbanism its focus and Iran its prime example. The Vision Call competitions are place-

Buckley, C (2025), "Living Car-Free in Arizona, on Purpose and Happily." *New York Times*, 10 April 2025.

Hassani EK (2025). "Preserving the Past, Designing the Future: Unveiling Climate-Resilient Design in Persian Vernacular Architecture for Modern Sustainability," in Cheshmehzangi A & Roaf S, ed's. (2025). *Persian Vernacular Architecture: Lessons from Master Builders of Iran on Climate Resilient Design*. Springer.

Meunier, J (2007). "Making Desert Cities," in Lynch P (2020), *On Intricacy, Canalside Press*, pp. 175–199.

specific, but the issues they raise are directly applicable elsewhere as responses to climate, and by analogy to any city grappling with “the presence of the past” and the tendency of postwar urban regeneration to ignore, discount, or replace it. Vision Call’s importance lies in the fact that it is part of a widespread reconsideration of Western modernism given its manifest shortcomings. The competitions’ entrants are in conversation with architects and planners worldwide who are also questioning it.

This is Rome’s Jubilee Year, marked by a Pope’s death and the election of his successor, both advocates for peaceful, meaningful, human-to-human dialogue across borders and cultures. That Iran_Lab is in this ancient city, the historic crossroads of so many civilizations, is fitting. Part of its value is as a convener of precisely this kind of fruitful exchange among practitioners, scholars, and researchers, seeking to evolve traditions in light of current needs, and mindful that the modern era is now part of it, one more aspect of the past to be reconsidered and built on. Vision Call speaks to a critical practice that lives in what Walter Benjamin called “now-time,” an unfolding present in which past and future surface as fragments, alive with possibility. Iran_Lab helps bring this into being. Its value is as a major point of convergence.

Alessandra De Cesaris

This second call for proposals yielded many interesting proposals and just as many points for reflection.

I will briefly touch on just a few aspects, but based on the participants’ reports and the jury’s comments, it is possible to trigger a series of further considerations.

1 Many of the visions aspire to rethink the garden fence. In many cases, its abolition is proposed, thus removing the boundary wall. Personally, I have always thought that the boundary wall was a fundamental element of the Persian garden, an element that clearly delimits an inside and an outside, an element that defines a sort of elsewhere protected from the outside world. It is difficult to eliminate it without distorting its deepest meaning.

In many cases, its abolition is proposed, thus removing the boundary wall. Personally, I have always thought that the boundary wall was a fundamental element of the Persian garden, an element that clearly delimits an inside and an outside, an element that defines a sort of elsewhere protected from the outside world. It is difficult to eliminate it without distorting its deepest meaning.

It is also true that the wall enclosing a protected space, on the external front, in the road reserve, defines spaces without quality, inactive blind fronts.

Hence the intelligent proposals for porous walls, but also

solutions for walls with habitable thicknesses that can accommodate small services and spaces to rest inside.

Nothing new, really, if we think of the enclosure with inhabited thicknesses of Bagh-e Fin in Kashan.

2 Many proposals look to the West. The desire to innovate draws on Western culture, taking as its reference gardens – often banal, without any particular qualities – that have nothing to do with our own tradition; a tradition that has given us extraordinary examples of the highest spatial quality. I believe that the archetype of the Persian garden can be reinvented, rethought and “modernised” without distorting its fundamental characteristics. For example, in this period of water emergency, taking into account contemporary needs, one could think of Phyto purification gardens capable of bringing air and greenery into the dense urban fabric of the contemporary city. Gardens equipped with Phyto purification tanks for white water coming from the urban texture.

The proposals for raised gardens are interesting, provided that they do not become mere window dressing or greenwashing. These gardens could organize a new share of public green spaces in the contemporary city.

3 A final consideration concerns the use of artificial intelligence. In many visions, there is a surprising disconnect between what is written in the report and the images. The texts are interesting, the images much less so: redundant, excessive, and above all, not corresponding to the text.

It would be interesting to cross-check and use artificial intelligence to request a commentary text for the images.

Tommaso Berretta

A general consideration needs to be done about the use of Artificial Intelligence generated images both in general but, specifically, looking to the theme and objectives of the present call for proposal. We are experiencing a unique moment in terms of overlapping between human and artificial intelligence (and tools) for our field of work. It is not something completely new, as the relationship between architecture and the technology driven innovations already happened in the recent past if we consider how much our way of working changed in those last 25 years.

AI defines a possible giant leap that, on the other hand, can be dangerous if it lacks of a proper control: in terms of graphic output but and, more important, considering the hierarchy between human thinking and AI power. In some of the images included in the design proposals this relationship seems to be weak from the architecture point of view: is the design that drives the graphic output

or it is the AI that defined it? In other words, facing new representation technologies that ease the process in terms of output needs to be paired with a stronger design method as the risk is to hand the project to the drawing technical- graphic tools we use. A problem that increase with today's free and quick access to AI and for short and conceptual proposal like the one answering the call.

This criticality emerges in different projects, and we felt as necessary to arise awareness on the importance of using technologies and approaches that we can control within our design method and procedure. As final provocation: we would have preferred a more conceptual-schematic approach capable of showing your true thinking instead of realistic-cold-generic AI images that seem to be more AI driven than thinking related.

ENVISIONING THE ROLE OF GARDENS IN THE FUTURE OF IRANIAN CITIES

A Hanging Piazza: Transforming Gardens into Bridges

Rasa Bahry, SeyedAli SeyedArab



Given the various sites and urban functions, a macro-level typology of connections has been considered:

1. Building-to-Building Connections:

- 1-1 Private to Private (neighborhood to neighborhood)
- 1-2 Private to Public (commercial center to neighborhood)
- 1-3 Public to Public (commercial center to commercial center)

2. Building-to-Ground Connections:

- 2-1 Public to Public (commercial center to urban passage)
- 2-2 Private to Public (neighborhood to urban passage)

3. Ground to Ground:

- 3-1 Passage to Passage (like a green pathway or urban pedestrian street on both sides of a highway, with the potential to become a large urban pedestrian square)
- 3-2 Urban Public Cantilever Just extending over the ground level

Two cases have been designed and analyzed in greater detail.

The issue of gardens and green spaces has a long-standing interconnection with urban fabric. This is particularly evident in unconventional structures like the city of Tehran, where most of its historical gardens have been replaced by tall vertical buildings, often equipped with largely unused courtyards. Additionally, the trend is moving towards the gradual disappearance of private gardens within the city. Given the urban street layout, these green spaces are increasingly transforming into isolated islands akin to urban apartment complexes.

Today's Tehran is no longer a city for pedestrians. Given the relatively low price of gasoline compared to other consumer goods in Iran and the construction of tunnels and highways without considering pedestrians, the ground level of Tehran has been dominated by cars. This issue leads to unpleasant consequences, such as the loss of potential for the creation of pedestrian urban squares that facilitate social interactions, a role that a garden can effectively play.

Given the current situation, if a garden elevates itself above street level and functions as a connective tissue within the urban fabric, rather than acting like the isolated parks in Tehran, we essentially encounter an aerial bridge with a purpose beyond mere pedestrian transit. This bridge fosters social interaction and provides access to a new typology of first-floor urban spaces. This approach introduces a different type of building with various functions. For instance, it could create small urban gardens within residential buildings or large shopping centers, incorporating diverse functions on their levels. Connecting these functions and buildings will create a new pedestrian urban fabric, where the garden structure integrates the pathway with the functional cores. Additionally, the structure of the Persian garden has been completely fragmented and reconfigured to form a new type of garden with elements suited to the urban context. The green pathway, like a painting of nature elevated above the vehicular movement level, enhances urban aesthetics. In general, a floating piazza would be generated.

