

Land Reform in Iran and its Effects on Rural Landscapes: Enormous Lessons for the Future

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Reforma rolna
w Iranie i jej skutki
w krajobrazie
wiejskim – istotna
lekcja na przyszłość

Introduction

Exploitation, oppression, and forced labor in landlord and peasant system were common sense across Iran's villages before the land reform [Delgarm 1980, pp. 3–12] and were threatening Shah's political stability. He, as a result, decided to commence a governmental revolution before a national revolution started by the masses. He called it the white revolution later [Mc Lachlan 1988].

Land reform in Pahlavi period contributed to many changes. Changes in the system of the agricultural production, occupational structure, and social stratification reflect the extent of the villages' transition to capitalist agriculture [Islami 2005]. Furthermore, the present research will show that the land reform in Iran led to sweeping changes in rural landscapes and affected rural environments and settlements, from the landscape architectural point of view, as well.

Necessity of the research

The author believes that there is a divergence of opinions about the weaknesses and strengths of the land reform amongst the related researchers because of their bigotry to either the Pahlavi or Islamic Republic regime in Iran. It is self-evident that studying this issue will shed light on the way to evaluate the land reform

consequences in Iran. The issue of rural landscapes is one of the most important fields affected by Iran's land reform, deeply. The author is convinced that rural landscapes as a national treasure of each country indicate cultural, social, political, and economical history of each territory. If that is the case, it needs comprehensive researches to find the main effective factors determining Iran's rural landscapes before and after the land reform. The findings will show that what there would be the positive and/or negative land reform effects on Iran's rural landscapes and rural environments and settlements.

Religious-historic background

Over the years, agriculture has been prized by Iranian religions especially amongst Zoroastrian followers [Deylami 1987, pp. 117–119; Yarshater 1982]. Avesta's statements encouraged people to cultivate on the land. The mentioned holy book, for example, compares the land with a maid in many cases as follows:

“Unhappy and unfulfilled is the long untilled land on which there hasn't been spread any seed, like a beautiful maid without a child willing to have a good husband” [Doustkhah 1991, pp. 681].

Definitely, the statement above and the vast majority of similar cases indicate that fertilizing arable lands have been among the most religious and sacred applications for Iranian Zoroastrians. Such historic-religious

backgrounds urge Persian people to arboriculture, agriculture, and gardening. Hence, the Pahlavi regime struggled to apply land reform in Iran under the cover of such religious-historic backgrounds about the agriculture.

Methodology

The researcher presents an innovative pattern to achieve the sound and appropriate results rather than the questionable ones.

According to the methodology, the research falls into two phases. Phase 1 consists of three steps including general studies on the land reform in Iran, choosing the suitable case studies, and multiple qualitative analyses in the social, political, historical, and economic categories. Afterwards, in phase 2, the researcher compares and determines the rural landscape in two periods: before and after the land reform. Finally, in the second step of phase 2, the researcher prepares analytic-descriptive patterns to show how the land reform changed the rural landscapes in Iran.

The researcher has focused on 15 villages in 9 provinces to evaluate rural landscape changes before and after the land reform. To obtain credible results, the reputable and prestigious documents have been investigated. In addition, the causal comparative research has been selected as the basic research method. The researcher has paid particular

Table 1. The general information about the villages was investigated in the present research

| Village | Province | Location in Iran | Climate | Morphology |
|--------------|------------|------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Sulan | Hamadan | West | Cold-humid | Linear |
| Hamaneh | Yazd | Center | Hot-arid | Central |
| Ghahroud | Isfahan | Center | Semi-hot-arid | Central |
| Koushksar | Fars | Southwest | Semi-hot-arid | Central |
| Khourabad | Qum | Center | Hot-arid | Central |
| Shishdangi | Fars | Southwest | Semi-hot-arid | Central |
| Varkaneh | Hamadam | West | Cold-humid | Linear |
| Negel | Kurdistan | West | Cold-humid | Linear |
| Rostam Abad | Kermanshah | West | Semi-cold-humid | Central |
| Tangi Sar | Kurdistan | West | Cold-humid | Linear |
| Ghasrian | Kurdistan | West | Semi-cold-humid | Central |
| Sangtarashan | Luristan | Southwest | Semi-hot-arid | Central |
| Vasht | Hamadan | West | Semi-cold-humid | Central |
| Siahou | Hormozgan | South | Hot-humid | Linear |
| Kerend | Kermanshah | West | Semi-cold-humid | Central |

attention to the field research and informal observation, as well.

To choose the appropriate case studies, the researcher has emphasized on the concept of variety in three aspects of the location, climate, and morphology. Table 1 shows the general information about the case studies.

Iran land reform in summary

Iran launched a sweeping land reform in 1962, which was implemented in three phases over a decade under shah's "White Revolution". While shah's regime interest in land reform is believed to have been primarily political [Mc Lachlan 1988,

pp. 105–52] – dismantling the power base of the landowning class – the implementation of the reform contributed to a dramatic decline in absentee land ownership and the sharecropping system, leading to a substantial increase in peasant proprietorship [Amid 1990, pp. 88–110; Salmanzadeh and Jones 1979, pp. 108–127; Islami 1973, pp. 120–131].

Generally speaking, Iran land reform was classified as anti-feudal plan to eradicate feudalism, to establish capitalism in the non-reform sector, and to promote political stability [Majd 1987]. At the time of the land reform, Iran had 60,520 villages and 22,933 farms. Of 60,520 villages, 6,239 villages were without agriculture, in the state of abandonment, or served as seasonal residences for

migrating tribes, and 2,083 were mechanized (Iran Statistical Center, hereafter ISC, 1975, pp. 244–245) could be classified as agricultural categories. These findings were confirmed by 1974 agricultural census, which also showed that 72% of the farms were included in village land and that the vast majority were uninhabited [*Rural and Agricultural Statistics of Iran*, hereafter RASI, p. 159].

Agricultural-production systems included the coexistence of four different types of agricultural-production systems in the village: a peasant production system, pump-owner tenant farmers, a large private capitalist farm, and the remnant of the landlord-sharecropping system [Islami 2005].

Before the land reform in Iran, just in 29% of the agricultural lands there was a peasant production system. 59% and 12% of other agricultural lands were under the landlord-sharecropping and tenant farmers systems, respectively [Iran Ministry of Agriculture 1961].

In that time, the village's social structure was nearly homogenous, largely dominated by absentee land ownership and sharecropping arrangements. Most households were sharecroppers at the same level in the village's social hierarchy, lacking any appreciable internal socio-economic differentiation [Ward English 1966; Bonine 1980].

Iranian land reformers and their American policy advisers were operating on the basis of a concept

of feudalism, which was ill-suited to Iran's agrarian sector, a one-size-fits-all concept of feudalism that, more than just incidentally, was the common substitute of both Marxist and liberal modernization theory advocates [Hillenbrand 2002].

Iran land reform and its relationship with rural landscapes

The land reform in Iran had direct and indirect effects on rural landscapes. The evidence shows that the factors creating and determining rural landscapes have been affected by the land reform during several decades [Mc Lachlan 1988; Islami 2005; Hojjat, 2007]. The author will illustrate that after the land reform, land uses, physical density, and the circumstance of rural development changed and then, other related sub-changes appeared. The findings of the research also indicate that there were at least six factors affecting rural landscape before the land reform but after that, the land reform consequences in rural spaces caused in-depth changes in rural landscapes because of emerging new causes and therefore, new effects.

Iran's rural landscapes before the land reform

Water accessibility, security, the model of revenue operation from the land, ownership right, geographical constraints, and livelihood has af-

ected the form of Iran's village since many centuries ago [Vosouqi 2008, pp. 28–29]. Explicitly, the mentioned factors have affected many aspects of rural communities and in the same period on rural landscapes. If that is the case, a question is derived from the statement given above: what were the most pronounced effects of the given factors on Iran's rural landscapes, in reality?

The earlier studies show that as a traditional rule, the village was founded on unfertilized lands, rocky areas, and waste places [Hojjat 2007; Lampton 1998]. Furthermore, before the land reform, peasantry housing was in substandard level and with the minimum area with unsuitable living facilities [Lampton 1998, pp. 669-671], (fig. 1, 2).

In addition, agricultural production system was on the basis of five elements including land, water, cow, seed, and labor force before the land reform [Lampton 1998, p. 536]. The village lord owned the four first elements [Mirabolghasimi 1980, p. 57] and peasant had to use his/her own muscular strength as his/her capital [Hojjat 2007].

The researcher in the table below has sorted six important and effective factors which affected rural landscapes before the land reform in Iran. These expressions are resulted from the author's analysis during the research in all fifty case studies.



Fig. 1. Minimum housing in an Iranian village before the land reform



Fig. 2. A peasant family with the minimum facility for traveling before the land reform in the south east of Iran

Table 2. The main factors which affected Iran's rural landscapes before the land reform

| Factors | The effects on Iran's rural landscapes before the land reform |
|--------------------------|--|
| Water accessibility | It caused physical rural development and growth along rivers or around the springs, pounds, or wells. Water sources played a crucial role as the most important origin of the rural area. |
| Security | As the second important criterion for constructing the villages after the water accessibility, compressed physical contexts across villages and constructing the residential areas on the foot of the hills and mountains in a compressed density were resulted from security needs. |
| Land revenue operation | As the vast majority of agricultural lands were managed by the landlord-sharecropping and tenant farmers systems, the proximity between the farm labor's minimum housings and agricultural lands was inevitable. |
| Ownership right | According to the landlord-sharecropping system, the farm lands and landscapes were integrated and extensive because the lords had many large areas without need for land subdivision. |
| Geographical constraints | The lack of technology led to indigenous and vernacular solutions to figure out the geographical challenges. In many cases, residential buildings were built on the top places far from floodway and flooding corridors. |
| Livelihood | Agriculture was the unique source for the labor forces to live. Therefore, farms and agricultural lands were founded and designed in the best places with the fertilize soil, suitable land slope, and easy water accessibility for irrigation. |

Iran's rural landscapes after the land reform

At the macro-level, Abdolali Lahsaeizadeh's study indicates that the land reform contributed to the development of both peasant capitalist farming and large-scale agricultural enterprises, representing 6.5 percent and 15 percent of arable lands in Iran, respectively, by 1975 [Lahsaeizadeh

1993, pp. 179–183]. The changes led to sweeping effects on rural landscapes, as well.

The researcher's studies illustrate that after operation of the land reform act in Iran, the primary factors and their values affecting rural landscapes have changed gradually, and new effective factors were replaced with the earlier factors. The researcher sorted the changes under

five general categories including decaying rural community, appearing technological infrastructures, expanding rural context, using urban building materials, and changing physical scales. In each case, the researcher indicates that how rural landscapes have been affected by the changes generated due to the land reform operation since 1962.

Decaying rural community

After the land reform, the lords and feudals transferred their investments into the cities and established the financial, industrial, and service institutes in the cities. Also, the peasants and farmers immigrated to cities for well-paid jobs [Hojjat 2007]. As a result, the villages were abandoned, gradually and in the same period, urbanization developed especially in outskirts because of the immigrations (fig. 3, 4).

On one hand, increasing urban population, and on the other hand, decreasing rural population, caused an unequal population growth between urban and rural settlements and this, in itself, contributed to an unorganized development in both Iranian cities and villages. The diagram below shows the percentage of urban and rural population from 1956 to 2006, during a half century (fig. 5, 6, 7).

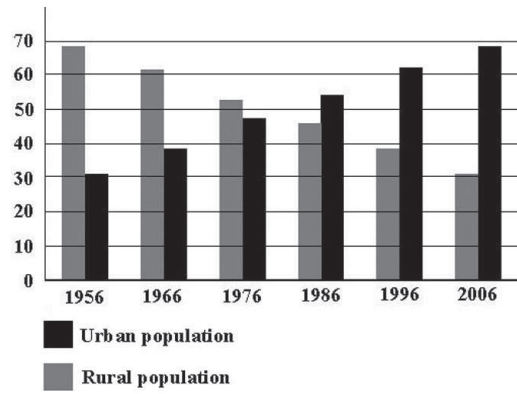


Fig. 3. The percentage of urban and rural population in Iran from 1966 to 2006

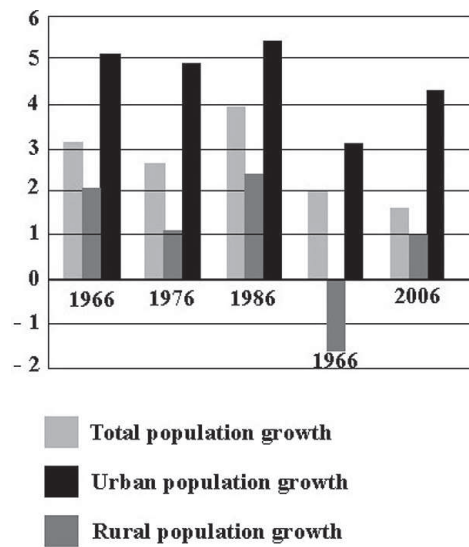


Fig. 4. The percentage of population growth in Iran from 1966 to 2006

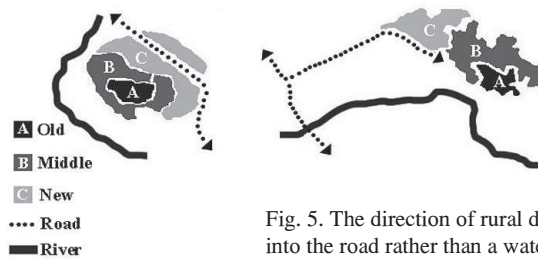


Fig. 5. The direction of rural development into the road rather than a water source after the land reform in two villages in Isfahan and Qum Provinces

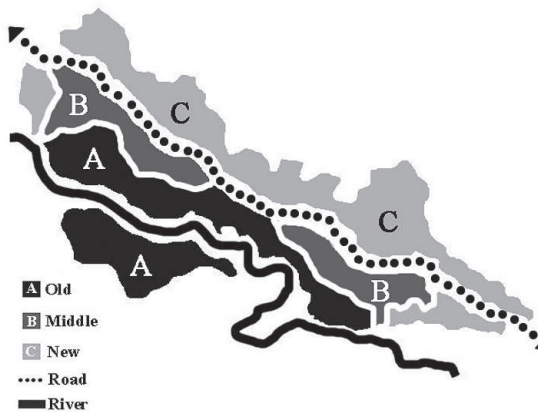


Fig. 6. The direction of rural development into the road rather than into a water source after the land reform in a village in Hamadan Province

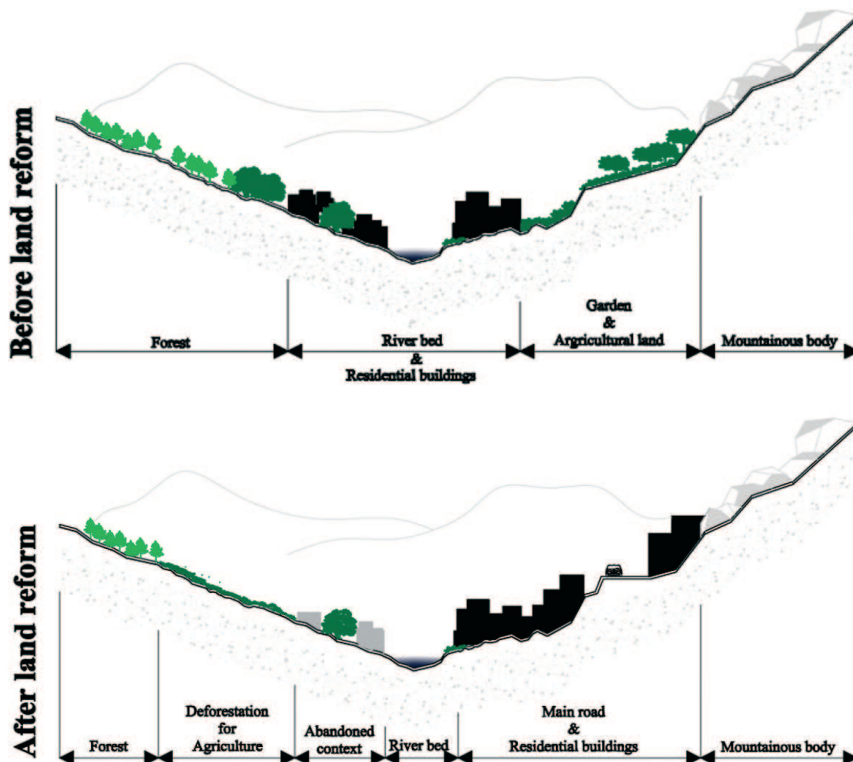


Fig. 7. A comparison between rural landscapes before and after the land reform in a village in Hamadan Province with emphasize on land use changes and direction of the rural development

The emerging of technological infrastructures

Studies show that during the land reform in Iran, the central government struggled to eliminate rural decay and, deprivation [Lampton 1998]. In doing so, a range of infrastructural buildings such as schools, health centers, communication receivers, and cooperative stores were built in villages [Hojjat 2007; Lampton 1998]. The findings of the research illustrate that all the cited buildings were founded nearby and along the village roads. Therefore, new buildings, according to the author's field researches, created a new rural context near the main rural road. Since then, the price of lands near the road and infrastructural buildings increased and also, the di-

rection of rural development moved to the main rural road [Hojjat 2007]. The new buildings created new land uses near the main rural road. The land uses were prized by local people because of their priority subject to the accessibility to the road. The oral interviews with the local people

in the present research applied by the author endorse the mentioned fact. There are many cases which justify the mentioned assertion, as well. The most important witness illustrating the fact is the extension of rural context to the road rather than a water source. The maps and sections prepared by the author emphasize the accuracy of the above argument in three case studies in three villages in different provinces of Iran (fig. 8).

Expanding rural context

Water storage tanks, electric motors for wells, and water piping separated the old rural context to the water resources forever [Ibid 2007]. In addition, the findings of the present research show that after eradication of feudalism and land-lord and peasant system, land ownership right changed so that peasants could build their house across their farms. For these reasons, the studies precisely show that physical density in rural context decreased and houses were built in other places with more free



Fig. 8. New infrastructures created new rural landscapes in relationship with the agricultural fields

terms than ever. Never should it be forgotten that the new rural road and electricity facilities provided more security, as well. The recent twofold items also, helped rural people to settle on their farms without any restriction (fig. 9).

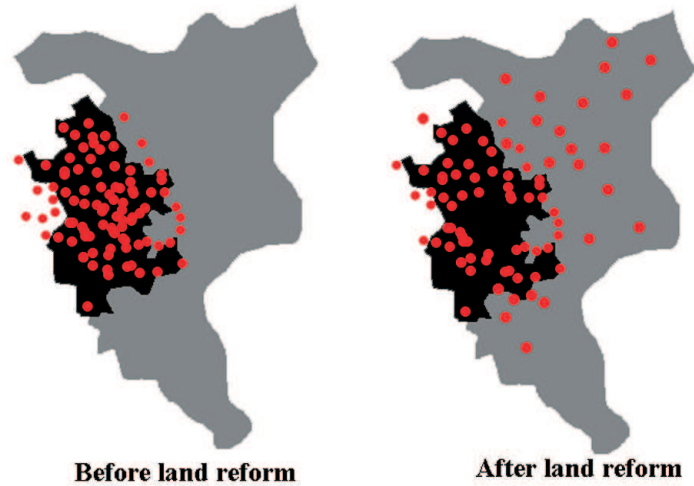
Using urban building materials

Road accessibility and automobile helped rural people to access the cities. They would travel to the cities to sell their agricultural products and purchase several crucial materials. One of the most important things among these materials which had deep effect on rural landscapes was used-materials for buildings. Peasants were purchasing them in low price to improve their house structure stability. This approach led to a non-homogenous landscape in rural building elevations and generated heterogeneous and disharmonic facades in rural landscapes in large scale (fig. 10).

Changing physical scales

The farm scale was under the influence of mechanized agriculture. Using tractor was the clearest instance in this category. Tractor was a useful automobile for peasants, which enforced them to plan wider rural alleys and provide new and especial spaces as the parking lot for it. Tractor also, helped peasants to work on larger and more extended farm lands in the short time (fig. 11, 12).

Fig. 9. A schematic plan showing rural development into other agricultural spaces and changes in rural context and rural density after the land reform in farming communities in Iran



Discussion and conclusion

The present research focused on the changes in factors affecting Iran rural landscapes in two periods, before and after the land reform. The research findings illustrate that the land reform changed Iran rural landscapes, deeply. Physical differences in rural landscapes before and after the land reform can be described as expressed in the present paper. The most important changes, resulted from the land reform, fall into four categories of rural contexts, physical scales, land values, and land uses. Firstly, rural contexts were divided into three qualities of the new, middle, and old. Secondly, physical scales changed from small and narrow to larger and wider spaces in both residential and agricultural environ-

ments. Thirdly, price of land near the rural roads increased and hence, land values around wells, springs and along rivers fell into decline. Fourthly, land use changes occurred in all places especially throughout farm lands and along main rural roads



Fig. 10. Disharmonic facades and heterogeneous rural landscapes in rural spaces after the land reform

Fig. 11, 12. Changes in rural space scales because of technological instruments and automobiles



because of cultural, technological, social, economical, and even political changes.

The history of the land reform in Iran and its relationship with rural landscapes reminds the fact that multi-purpose strategies and multi-aspect targets are forgotten only for economic and political goals in developing countries. The researcher believes that although landlord and peasant system, feudalism, and ex-

ploitation were eradicated forever in Iran by the land reform operation, rural deprivation remained and there were several negative effects on both rural and urban communities. Unequal population growth between rural and urban societies, confusion in natural sceneries because of technological facilities, lack of the unity in rural facades due to combination of traditional and modern materials, and environmental problems especially

water pollutions were generated after the land reform in Iran. The author is convinced that the vast majority of the mentioned negative results were the consequences of accessibility to urban areas without any pre-educational programs for rural people about the technology, without any necessary awareness about the modern life prerequisites, and without any cultural plan to preserve the tradition in rural areas.

There is no doubt that the land reform rescued the peasant from landlord and feudal oppressions and brought also many facilities and security for rural people. But, it is imperative to mention that after the land reform operation, rural landscapes transferred from natural and traditional identity into a complicated semi-urban-rural context. In addition, after the land reform, rural landscapes have been affected by the technology and accessibility to the urban areas.

Figures made by author.

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