

Geoforum

Against Utopia The (Un)Formation of Abbas Abad District in the Pahlavi Era --Manuscript Draft--

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Abstract:	<p>In the 1960s, a political vision emerged to transform Tehran into a cosmopolitan city, with the Abbasabad hills as its new modern symbolic centre. The highest political actors intervened in the project to boost its progress. On this occasion, the project's status gradually shifted to a new occasion. Despite possessing sufficient sovereignty and governmental stability, negative on-the-ground forces, such as financial limits and practical barriers, in Abbasabad surpassed top political actors' intentions. Consequently, the history of Abbasabad was characterized by pauses and failures, contrary to propaganda narratives. To comprehend the intricate history behind the (un)formation of Abbasabad, it is imperative to move beyond human actions, discursive occurrences, and master plans. The history of Abbasabad resembles a constant shift from civic logic to the ordered one, which was aligned with metapolitical values meant to create a utopian city with earthly limits. Investigating the plans and actions of the municipality shows that once the municipality tried to utilize a pragmatic plan, it gradually shifted to unrealistic utopian logic. Maximizing ordered imaginations in the 1970s, as a result of approving metapolitical changes, ultimately hindered the project's progress, leading to the failure of the international property developer.</p>

Against Utopia: The (Un)Formation of Abbas Abad District in the Pahlavi Era

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4 **Against Utopia:**
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6 **The (Un)Formation of Abbas Abad District in the Pahlavi Era**
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10 **Abstract**
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13 In the 1960s, a political vision emerged to transform Tehran into a cosmopolitan city,
14 with the Abbasabad hills as its new modern symbolic centre. The highest political actors
15 intervened in the project to boost its progress. On this occasion, the project's status
16 gradually shifted to a new occasion. Despite possessing sufficient sovereignty and
17 governmental stability, negative on-the-ground forces, such as financial limits and
18 practical barriers, in Abbasabad surpassed top political actors' intentions. Consequently,
19 the history of Abbasabad was characterized by pauses and failures, contrary to
20 propaganda narratives. To comprehend the intricate history behind the (un)formation of
21 Abbasabad, it is imperative to move beyond human actions, discursive occurrences, and
22 master plans. The history of Abbasabad resembles a constant shift from civic logic to the
23 ordered one, which was aligned with metapolitical values meant to create a utopian city
24 with earthly limits. Investigating the plans and actions of the municipality shows that once
25 the municipality tried to utilize a pragmatic plan, it gradually shifted to unrealistic utopian
26 logic. Maximizing ordered imaginations in the 1970s, as a result of approving metapolitical
27 changes, ultimately hindered the project's progress, leading to the failure of the
28 international property developer.
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53 **Keywords:** Pahlavi, Iran, Tehran, municipality, non-discursive, narrative.
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59 **Introduction**
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4 Recent studies have investigated the history of the capitals in the 20th century,
5
6 scrutinizing the links between space and politics. Significant ideologies, nationalist
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8 movements, and modernization efforts often coincided with large-scale projects (Dovey,
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10 2008; *Power and Architecture: The Construction of Capitals and the Politics of Space*,
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12 2014; Vale, 2008). In the 20th century, Iran witnessed abrupt political changes. The Qajar
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14 regime, which had been in power for a long time, was dissolved in 1925. During World
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16 War II, the Allies forced the monarch to abdicate in 1941, and Mohammad Reza Shah
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18 assumed the throne with limited authority. In 1953, the United States and Britain
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20 orchestrated a coup to strengthen the monarchy. Thus, there were relatively short-term
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22 stabilities in power to undertake any megaprojects until the 1960s when the shah began
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24 planning certain initiatives, such as the White Revolution, which was announced in 1963.
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32 During this period, Tehran, the capital of the nation had a population growth of 10
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34 times in the 1960s, in only 40 years (*Tehran Metropolis Atlas*). The White Revolution was
35
36 tied with space as from then, an aggressive modernization program started throughout
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38 the city, leading to rapid urbanization and Westernization (The Editors of Encyclopaedia,
39
40 2022). From this moment, several urban projects were proposed and progressed under
41
42 the direct influence of the Royal Court, Mohammadreza Shah, and Queen Farah. One of
43
44 the most notable projects proposed was on the site of Abbasabad hills, making it a new
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46 centre of the city. The project was given various exclusive titles such as "The Royal
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48 Capital Center" ("NLAI, No. 340000458,"), "The National Center" (Llewelyn Davies
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50 International, 1976b, p. 33), "Cultural Acropolis of Iran"(Llewelyn Davies International,
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52 1976b, p. 64), The Modern Persepolis ("Details of Abbasabad construction plan," 1974),
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54 and "the Biggest Square in the World" ("Details of Abbasabad construction plan," 1974).
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4 Surprisingly, this seemingly dignified project's earthly reality is more numbing than
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6 ordinary projects. The construction was circumscribed to a few city services and symbolic
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8 actions, whereas all nearby regions were alive office high-class districts with high
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10 demands.
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14 All these inconsistencies raise questions about why this site remained unoccupied
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16 despite having three significant master plans. Why did the project experience major
17
18 setbacks, delays, and failures while overseen by the highest political desire? It is
19
20 necessary to mention that many historians confessed that the political sovereign of the
21
22 Pahlavi regime in the 1960s and even 1970s was dominant, and the Islamic Revolution
23
24 was unpredictable, occurring in just the very last years (Amanat, 2017, p. 861; Zibakalam,
25
26 1997, pp. 11-13). Therefore, narrating the political discursive history alone cannot explain
27
28 the constant pauses and losses in Abbasabad. Although some answers are being made
29
30 to answer the abovementioned questions by giving reasons based on political discourses
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32 or economic reasons, other effective actors are being ignored. These unseen actors are
33
34 mostly absent in official narratives represented in the statements, political interviews, and
35
36 even released Master Plans. In contrast, some clues are implicitly represented, while
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38 some non-human actors are just mentioned in confidential documents. Accessing these
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40 documents is the basic challenge, necessitating alternative methodologies to bring these
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42 marginalized actors to the forefront of the narrative.
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55 **Methodology: A Conceptual Framework**

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4 The undoubtful fact for Abbasabad is the superiority of negative forces over utopian
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6 conceptualizations and political wills. Therefore it is vital not to neglect the main character,
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8 a methodology is needed to narrate the history of negative on-the-ground forces instead
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10 of over-attention in the imaginative Master Plans. It is vital to investigate non-discursive
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12 realities more than just mentioning them, only if they are related to the politically dominant
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14 discourses.
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19 The Foucauldian genealogical approach is exercised to recognize non-discursive and
20
21 over-discursive. By reviewing Foucault's theory, Dovey suggests that the built
22
23 environment plays as a metaphor, a figure of discourse (Dovey, 2008, p. 15). By using
24
25 Rotry's thought that "imagination plays a key role in power" (Rotry, 1992, p. 13), Dovey
26
27 argues that architects are urban designers who are imaginative agents that enlarge public
28
29 imagination and are crucial for discourses of power (Dovey, 2008, p. 15). Thus,
30
31 architecture as a figure of discourse nourishes the public imagination. However, the
32
33 architecture of Abbasabad remained only in the realm of imagination and never came into
34
35 reality. Therefore, why should we narrate architectural history based solely on
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37 imagination?
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44 Moreover, Foucault's four principles, introduced in *The Discourse on Language*
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46 (Foucault, 1972, p. 229), are quite relevant to the Abbasabad condition. "Reversal" lets
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48 us cast doubt on the sources of discourse and claims about their negative activity.
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50 "Discontinuity" lets us consider discourses as discontinuous activities while
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52 corresponding, changing, or opposing to other ones. "Specificity" declares that a prior
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54 system of significations cannot resolve a particular discourse and it is striving to read the
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4 real world. Lastly, "exteriority" prevents us from investigating the hidden means and
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6 instead, "we should look for its external conditions of existence."
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10 Besides the Althusserian concept of Overdetermination can enable us to "describe
11 the effects of the contradictions in each practice" as it is said that for Althusser the
12 overdetermination of a contradiction was seen as "the reflection . . . of its conditions of
13 existence within the complex whole, that is, of the other contradictions in the complex
14 whole, in other words, its uneven development" (Althusser & Balibar, pp. 315-316). This
15 is a reliable tool to narrate the history of multifactored contradictions that led Abbasabad
16 to pause.
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27 Bruno Latour's epistemology can also be used to make the history of non-humans
28 visible (Latour & Davis, 2019). Actor-Network Theory (ANT) lets us consider non-human
29 actors as well as humans. ANT is well theorized for architecture and its relationship with
30 politics, as Yaneva distinguishes politics of space with Politics of space (with capital P):
31 "On numerous occasions, I was tempted to speak about big politics . . . and explain
32 architectural objects with contexts and politics to satisfy the curiosity of architectural
33 historians and play the game of mainstream architectural contextualism, I decided to
34 remain at the myopic, microscopic level of the practice. . . Yet, at any moment in time did
35 these buildings appeared as blatant and purified embodiments of big politics related to
36 governments or ideologies, I rather witnessed a kind of politics (politics with small p) that
37 was generated by artefacts, devices, material arrangements, settings, technologies and
38 buildings as they connected with many other things in a network. That is contextual,
39 relational politics" (Yaneva, 2017, pp. 162-163). The mentioned methodologies aim to
40 challenge the official narratives of space, which are often based on concrete imaginations
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4 like master plans or designs, by involving other realities. By using these methodologies,
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6 we can explore the underlying reasons for the formation of space throughout history.
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10 Looking through previous studies on Abbasabad in the Pahlavi Era, some studies
11
12 have been done mostly based on investigating masterplans (Mashayekhi, 2019; Mohajeri,
13
14 2015; Mozaffari & Westbrook, 2020). The master-plan-based approach has unintended
15
16 consequences. The method of analyzing historical periods through the lens of Master
17
18 Plans can limit our understanding of the bigger picture by focusing too much on specific
19
20 moments in time, without considering the causes and reasons for the shifts. While Master
21
22 Plans and politics are important factors to consider, they are not the only ones. Therefore,
23
24 to gain a more complete and holistic view of historical events, we will narrate the
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26 periodization in different moments, taking into account all relevant factors. Other studies
27
28 analyze through particular theoretical lenses (Ehsanfar, 2008; Pourmohammedreza,
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30 2009), some studies have just narrowed down to a small period (Yousefi, 2015).
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32 Hourcade (1978 September 1996) and Emami (2014) have tried to explain the situation
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34 by considering different events, however, they had limited access to Iranian-based
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36 archives and Internal documents.
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47 **A Historical Review**

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51 The government has seized the Abbasabad district since the Qajar era. In 1931,
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53 Abbasabad was entrusted to the Ministry of War ("NLAI, No. 230031629,"); decades later,
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55 a military base was erected, and shortly after residential houses for militant families were
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57 built around it. The new residential district was just an organic consequence of the rapid
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4 growth of Tehran. Abbasabad, a vast and marginal land outside of the capital, was
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6 gradually joining the city through these decades. However, these changes just occurred
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8 in the very south side, whereas all other parts managed to survive without any
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10 construction, primarily because of the area's strict topography (Figure 1).
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15 In the 1960s with some slums, this enormous empty pallet with 5.5 million square
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17 meters was nominated as the heart of modern Tehran according to the Comprehensive
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19 Plan. In the mid of the mid-1960s, the shah ordered making Tehran "beautiful", and
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21 replacing slums or obsolete houses with Parks (Nikpey, n.d.-b, p. 61). In a few months,
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23 he initiated ordering vital urban changes such as making the plan for new highways in
24
25 Tehran (Nikpey, n.d.-b, p. 70) and planning the first Comprehensive Plan for Tehran
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27 (Nikpey, n.d.-b, p. 75). Shah had a desire to transform Tehran into a modern and
28
29 cosmopolitan city, which was furthered by hosting the Asian Olympics in 1974. The
30
31 following year, Tehran was nominated as a potential host for the 1986 International
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33 Olympics ("Tehran's bid for the 1984 Olympic Games," 1975). This effort aimed to
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35 modernize and internationalize Tehran, with the Abbasabad district becoming its central
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37 and prestigious new centre (Figure 2).
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48 **I. A New Will Rises (the 1960s-1971)**

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51 The fate of Abbasabad was changed by the command of the shah, resulting in a halt
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53 to all organic developments. The Shah desired a new spatial arrangement for the city as
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55 it was not adequately prepared for royal ceremonies such as the 2500-year celebration
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57 that was supposed to be held in 1961 (Writers' Council of Historical Document Review
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4 Center, 1998, p. 2). The highest political will was to boost urban progress by direct
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6 intervention.
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10 In March 1966, "His Imperial Majesty" outlined the general program for planning
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12 Abbasabad, which was later named "Plan for Northern Abbasabad" (PNA). The plan
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14 aimed to create "one of the world's most attractive urban places". It included three main
15
16 components: a new North-South Highway, the first of its kind nationwide, a central square
17
18 with international importance, and new high-quality residential areas ("NLAI, No.
19
20 340000458,"). Although the visual maps of PNA have been lost in national archives, only
21
22 textual evidence is available, which is correspondent to a model survived in Louis Kahn's
23
24 collection (Figure 3): A "central square", constructed on a terraced platform to present an
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26 "ensemble" of "representative" buildings and "flower gardens"; At the "southern edge of
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28 the square" a new city hall will be erected [which is visible as a mastaba-like structure in
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30 the bottom of the picture]. The other buildings which shall "enclose" the square can only
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32 be defined in a general way: "Administrative" buildings in the West, and "commercial"
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34 buildings in the East. Roosevelt Street and Nezami Street will be "widened to 45m along
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36 the square" ("NLAI, No. 340000458,").

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39 The above descriptions clearly illustrate the southern part of the image. However, the
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41 image and text present a contrasting view of the northern part: "The north of the square .
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43 . . . will also be the turning point where the character of the open area will change from
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45 garden to forest . . . The forest will cover all the military area north of Nezami street, and
46
47 it is proposed to expand to the west up to an existing 30m north-south street" ("NLAI, No.
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49 340000458,"). Contrary to the text, the figure illustrates another concept: a giant east-
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51 west square with seemingly fewer functions above the Nezami Street, devoid of buildings;
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4 Well-organized boulevards are situated in the northern section starting from the giant
5 square; Moreover, numerous individual buildings are positioned on the northern hills,
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7 harmonizing with the topography.
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12 The PNA project had more than one phase. The initial phase involved construction
13 limited to the south of Nezami Street. Therefore, the initial phase was reliable to the
14 existing major routes. However, in the latter phase, supported by the maquette, the
15 construction extended extensively to the northern parts, with new routes implemented in
16 the design. For instance, the third road (or Shahanshahi Highway) was opened in 1975.
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25 The comparison between these two phases needs further investigation; Yet, the most
26 evident difference is that the forest was being altered by new constructions, which was
27 an essential part of the project. It aimed to resemble Central Park in New York, Hyde Park
28 in London, and Boulogne Park in Paris ("NLAI, No. 340000458,"). The reason for the loss
29 of the "Central Park of Tehran" has to be pursued in the economic aspects. After a year,
30 "the Imperial Majesty" ordered the general program of planning Abbasabad. A dispute
31 was revealed in the National Economic Council. The Minister of Housing and Urban
32 Development expressed that landowning this neighbourhood is uneconomical due to
33 private landowners (Nikpey, n.d.-a, pp. 56-57). Regardless of that, the shah insisted on
34 Abbasabad, while suggesting that public credits also can be spent for this project and that
35 construction can be continued gradually (Nikpey, n.d.-a). Even when the Minister of Water
36 and Electricity suggested two other districts in the central region of Tehran to alleviate
37 economic barriers, the shah declined (Nikpey, n.d.-a, p. 57)
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57 The reason for the shah's insistence can be explained in different ways. Besides the
58 fact that the natural growth of Tehran was directed in the northern direction, the shah had
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4 recently moved from the Golestan Palace in the downtown to the northern palaces which
5
6 were almost located at the edge of the city. Abbasabad was located in the middle distance
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8 between the central palace and the northern palace, and as Hourcade says, the plan of
9
10 the new city centre would represent a new order (Hourcade, 1996). Consequently, the
11
12 shah persisted in a project that would absorb the largest part of public urban planning
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14 investments for the whole country, which was more leaned to the Northern part of the city
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16 (Hourcade, 1978 September, p. 166), even though the costs were irrationally irrelevant
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18 to the capabilities.
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25 Regardless of shah's insistence on the total implementation of the project, which had
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27 devastating consequences, he seemed to show resilience among some urban
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29 rationalities at this moment. For instance, the Interior Minister expressed that the plan
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31 was presented to the shah, and with his approval, it was implemented on a smaller scale
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33 due to its vastness ("NLAI, No. 340000458,"). This coincides with the time when the first
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35 phase of the PNA was being introduced. Parallely at this moment, there was a growing
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37 interest in legalization as evidenced by the establishment of the Abbasabad Complex
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39 Management Company (ACMC). This company have been governed by unique
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41 regulations passed by the National Council in Iran (Sharif Emami, 1971), making it the
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43 only company with such a distinction (Tehran Urban Research and Planning Center,
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45 2017, p. 14).
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52 To conclude, at this moment, the power had a strong will to maintain the utopian
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54 project at any cost. However, the project's settings were adjusted by accepting rational
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56 decisions through legal channels. Additionally, the power wanted to boost progress by
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58 rearranging the human actors. For example, in May 1969, dissatisfied with the lack of
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4 progress at Abbasabad, the shah gave a one-week ultimatum to the mayor to make some
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6 progress at Abbasabad, or Nikpey would take the responsibility for the municipality
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8 (Nikpey, n.d.-c, p. 63). In June 1969, Nikpey became the new mayor (Nikpey, n.d.-c, p.
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10 75).
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18 **II. The Suspension Phase (1973-74)**

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21 To unify all the properties in Abbasabad, landowning, and being prepared for the
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23 Utopian project, an emeritus major-general was selected as the executive director of
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25 ACMC. Landowning Abbasabad, an expensive district with more than 40% price of the
26
27 average land in Tehran (Ministry of Roads and Urban Development) needed high loads
28
29 of financial support. Later in 1974, massive bribes were discovered by the Royal
30
31 Investigators, which was widely publicized in newspapers ("The bribe-takers of the
32
33 Abbasabad plan were convicted," 1977, March 2). The reason for this scandal was
34
35 spatial: "putting some properties out of the boundaries of the project" ("The trial of those
36
37 accused of taking bribes in the Abbasabad project has begun," 1977, January 27). The
38
39 government aimed to expand the project's scope, but people were reluctant to include
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41 their lands in the proposed boundaries. Despite the government's efforts to purchase
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43 lands in Abbasabad with seemingly generous privileges, public opinion preferred to retain
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45 their lands due to the longstanding reliability of the housing and property industry which
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47 have been a secure investment since the 1960s.
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56 Once ACMC, erected as a legal patron of Abbasabad, was now affected by financial
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58 corruption. This corruption was made possible by prior foregrounds. For instance, when
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4 the new mayor enrolled, the shah let him obtain loans from "any" institutes for the project
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6 (Nikpey, n.d.-c). Later, in 1973, the mayor surpassed the principals by requesting an
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8 interest exemption for previous loans, which the Minister of Finance opposed, citing legal
9
10 and critical issues. However, the shah supported the mayor's request ("NLAI, No.
11
12 230031109,"). 1973 has to be considered a significant shift from the rule of law and logic
13
14 to favouritism. The exclusion of Abbasabad brings to mind Schmitt's assertion that
15
16 "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception" (Schmitt, 1985, p. 5). Concurrently, in
17
18 this year the national oil revenue boomed four times (Zibakalam, 1997, p. 37). On this
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20 occasion, the municipality's role drastically changed accordingly. Unlike 1971 that the
21
22 mayor had described that Abbasabad's fate would be like any other ordinary
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24 neighbourhood, as he said in the 143rd session of the city council
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32 *“...at the first stage, only land-owning is considered so that the*
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34 *municipality can become the owner and see what it wants to do with*
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36 *this land. I think that the municipality can invest about 30 million*
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38 *Tomans there in compliance with the city's comprehensive plan; it will*
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40 *build parks, streets, and sidewalks, and will also lay telephone and*
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42 *electric cables, water and sewage pipes, and divide some parts of the*
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44 *district into pieces. It will be sold so that people can build according to*
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46 *the regulations of the Comprehensive Plan” (“NLAI, No. 340004720,”),*
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52 in 1973, the municipality defined itself as liable for the Utopian project, comparable
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54 with well-known foreign developers, in the English Magazine for international audiences:
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4 *“But Abbasabad . . . has been something of a “white elephant” for*
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7 *Tehran. Lying open and ready for years and years, the pressure to*
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9 *develop it now comes at a time when individual and corporate*
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11 *international developers can easily find ripe and sure-fire projects in*
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13 *Europe and the United States. Iran, being familiar with the methods of*
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15 *large-scale real estate development, has tried unsuccessfully to*
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17 *persuade foreign developers that Abbasabad would be an equally good*
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19 *investment. But they all seemed to find projects with less risk*
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21 *everywhere. One firm, Kilroy Industries of California, did offer proposal,*
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23 *but basic differences of opinion arose, and the project never got*
24
25 *underway. So, the municipality decided to tackle Abbasabad alone”*
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27 *(“Tehran: a capital in search of itself,” 1973 June-November, p. 96).*
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34 This represents a change in the tone of the Municipality. However, regardless of the
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36 last lofty sentence, a parallel administrative correspondence in the municipality
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38 demonstrates that the mayor was discussing the regulations of “auction” between foreign
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40 property developers for Abbasabad (“NLAI, No. 340005762,”). He knew foreign
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42 collaborations were inevitable, but why did the municipality start pretending it had
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44 capabilities despite being aware of its limits? The answer should be traced to the
45
46 involvement of a new player, Queen Farah. She was well-known as a leading arts patron
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48 nationwide and had academic experience in architecture. With her considerable
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50 influence, she could easily have invited renowned international architects such as Louis
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52 Kahn, who had previously visited Iran for a seminar sponsored by herself, and Kenzo
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54 Tange, a well-known architect of that time.
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4 The power imbalance between the municipality and the Queen resulted in conflicting
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6 viewpoints. The Municipality was worried about financial challenges and anticipated that
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8 it would lead them to sell parts of the city and jeopardise the project's unity (see "Tehran:
9
10 a capital in search of itself," 1973 June-November). Therefore, they aimed for a project
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12 covering 1-2 million square meters ("NLAI, No. 340005762,"). In comparison, the Queen
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14 and her architects sought a proposal for all five million square meters ("NLAI, No.
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16 340005762,"). The mayor couldn't be as ambitious as the Queen, stating that by the end
17
18 of 1973, around three million square meters of Abbasabad were still "practically" not
19
20 owned ("NLAI, No. 340005762,"). Moreover, PNA -even the extensive version- was still
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22 following some principles, such as the topography as "terraces" that "should follow the
23
24 level lines" ("NLAI, No. 340000458,"). Tange's plan consisted of a very strong north-south
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26 axis as a megaform, while Louis Kahn's plan consisted of more human-scaled spaces
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28 and plazas with much more limited scope (Figure 4). Some have admired Kahn's proposal
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30 for following the topography and natural principles (Emami, 2014, pp. 77-79; Mohajeri,
31
32 2015, p. 492). However, this is true if we compare only the Tange's with the Kahn's, but
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34 not when compared with PNA.
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44 The Municipality's viewpoints were fundamentally different and degrading according
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46 to the political actors. Queen saw the municipality as a threat (Emami, 2014, p. 88). Also,
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48 other government actors, such as the Interior Minister, belittled the municipality's
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50 imagination constantly ("NLAI, No. 340000458," ; "NLAI, No. 340000474,"). However, as
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52 private realities are being considered in this article, not the commonly held political-
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54 aligned views, the municipality's proposed plans were far more realistic!
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4 Although some have argued that Louis Kahn's death was the main reason that made
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6 the Queen and starchitects (Kahn and Tange) halt their projects, this reason seems very
7
8 personal and human-actor-based, neglecting the other events. For instance, Tange
9
10 proposed a new plan synthesized after Kahn's death to promote the final solution (Tange,
11
12 1976) as he was capable of this high-scaled project in retrospect to the fact that he was
13
14 nominated for designing the reconstruction plan of the capital city of Skopje in 1965. The
15
16 bigger problem is that some studies overestimated the significance of Kahn and Tange's
17
18 plans. The impact of these proposals on later developments should be questioned for a
19
20 few reasons. Firstly, the proposals were only valid for less than a year, While PNA was
21
22 developed parallel in a much longer period. Secondly, previous studies had completely
23
24 ignored PNA, so they might have overestimated and considered the starchitects'
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26 proposals as the first plan, tracing its influence on the latter projects. However, many
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28 components and forms had first evolved in the PNA and reappeared in the later proposals.
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36 Although some reduce the challenge between the mayor's and the Queen's viewpoint
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38 to the fact that the mayor was pro-British and strived to replace an English contractor to
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40 make personal profits (Writers' Council of Historical Document Review Center, 2006),
41
42 their viewpoints were fundamentally different. The mayor was looking for a constructor-
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44 designer more than a starchitect since he had predicted that even if the royal court
45
46 enacted the starchitects' proposal, later the property developers -as the main practical
47
48 actors of the construction phase- would probably disagree with the concept ("NLAI, No.
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50 340005762,").

51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 **III. An Illusionary Savior (1974-78)**

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4 Nikpey had rightly distinguished the primary problem of Abbasabad with his five years
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6 of close challenges with Abbasabad as mayor. A decade had passed since the shah had
7
8 ordered Tehran to be beautified. The mayor's main reason for being in the municipality
9
10 was to oversee the project, which had not made sufficient progress till then. Therefore,
11
12 the mayor had to use propaganda language in a discursive layer for the satisfaction of
13
14 the royal court, whereas some political actors such as the ministers belittled the civic-
15
16 balanced ideas of the municipality. For example, at this moment, in a City Council session,
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18 Nikpey introduced Abbasabad's project with an ambitious new maquette (Figure 5), which
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20 was much more enormous than the one which is available in Kahn's archive. After Queen
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22 and Kann's presence, the municipality redesigned and rescaled the PNA plan to make it
23
24 more ambitious. Simultaneously, the mayor used a propaganda tone to describe
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26 Abbasabad as the "20th-century Persepolis" that would never be destroyed ("Details of
27
28 Abbasabad construction plan," 1974).
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37 However, he later mentions limitations by stating they couldn't attract internal or
38
39 global capital ("Details of Abbasabad construction plan," 1974). Despite two failed
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41 attempts to attract international capital, the mayor was still hopeful for foreign cooperation
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43 on the project ("Details of Abbasabad construction plan," 1974). The mayor's pragmatic
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45 plans and explanations were unlike his new maquette plan.
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50 At this new moment, a widened gap could be recognized between lofty statements
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52 and the pragmatic plan of the municipality. Besides all the contradictions, a new hope
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54 emerged as economic situations changed; The new high-handed fifth national
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56 development program was suddenly being replaced to alter the previous one as the
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58 national oil revenues boomed (Bayandor, 2019, p. 95; Saber, 2019, pp. 56-57). An
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4 opportunity for big constructions was made. In late 1974, a large British property
5 developer, Llewelyn Davies International (LDI), enrolled to work in Abbasabad. It is
6 unclear how LDI was selected, as the municipality had previously strived to hold an
7 international "competition" to find the best plan ("NLAI, No. 340005762,"). However,
8 certain prerequisites were needed for the competition; basic regulations and mapping of
9 the area were required ("NLAI, No. 340005762,"), while the budget allocation for the area
10 mapping was just met five months before the competition was declared ("NLAI, No.
11 340005798,"). Furthermore, organizing the competition was time-consuming as additional
12 time was needed for announcing, setting deadlines, and judging the submissions. It is
13 quite likely that LDI, being the only available choice, was approached and accepted to
14 participate, making them the selected developers for Abbasabad.
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32 While the initial studies for LDI began in 1975, numerous plans were developed with
33 detailed text descriptions within just a few months(Figure 6). LDI was a notable office with
34 approximately 50 members directly involved in the new project of Abbasabad (Llewelyn
35 Davies International, 1976b, p. 156). The latest project was named the Shahestan-e
36 Pahlavi Plan (SPP), which is literally "the locus of the Pahlavi Shah." The proposed
37 master plan was published in a high-quality, colorful two-volume book in two languages
38 with a circulation of 1000. The groundbreaking ceremony was also extravagant with the
39 presence of the shah on the anniversary of the Iranian coup d'état of 1953 as the shah
40 had gained more sovereignty over the country.
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54 However, the shah and LDI contractors disputed the project timeline short after the
55 ceremony according to a governmental letter ("NLAI, No. 230039313,"). The LDI
56 consultants estimated that the project would take 20 to 25 years to complete, whereas
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4 "the obeyed orders" of the shah insisted that it should be finished in a maximum of 12
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6 years ("NLAI, No. 230039313,"). This disagreement stemmed from the different
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8 perspectives on the project's timeline, with LDI considering rationalities and barriers, while
9
10 the shah had idealistic expectations.
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15 Although these expectations were amplified by the fact that the Pahlavi government
16
17 was looking for a new strong picture, which is a political reason, it parallely has some
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19 background in Abbasabad. This expectation for a shorter timeline was initially outlined in
20
21 the regulations of the ACMC. In 1971, city council members were optimistic about
22
23 completing the project's land acquisition within four to seven years ("NLAI, No.
24
25 340004720,"). Surprisingly there were even discussions about dissolving the ACMC after
26
27 this period according to the drafts of the minute session. Although the shah's mandate
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29 was seemingly approved by LDI, unsurprisingly the project didn't progress until the
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31 Islamic Revolution of 1979.
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40 **Analysis and Argument**

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44 Before the 1960s, it was clear that Abbasabad was experiencing organic growth.
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46 However, from the White Revolution to the ambitious plans of the 1970s, some changes
47
48 can be traced. Investigating the proposed plans of the municipality, which are all termed
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50 PNA in this article, illustrates three phases from 1966 to 1974. These three plans could
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52 enhance the understanding of three moments of Abbasabad during the Pahlavi Era, in
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54 which the government actors acted completely differently from each other.
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4 When the first plan was released, some actors raised concerns over its difficult
5 construction and requested its cancellation or relocation. Although the Shah defended its
6 existence, he agreed to minimize the project. At this moment, ACMC was established by
7 the rule of law, boosting its progress. Optimism was dominant at this time, as many new
8 projects were being implemented in Tehran. At the same time, the first Comprehensive
9 Plan had a futuristic approach and planned for the next 25 years (Farmanfarmaian &
10 Victor Gruen Architects, 1968a, p. 1_1). The City Council anticipated that the construction
11 of Abbasabad would be completed between four to seven years.
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24 Some challenges surfaced when we looked at the second moment, called
25 "Suspension". While owning land in Abbasabad was expected to be less time-consuming,
26 the lack of financial investments made progress impossible. In the past, the mayor could
27 request loans from any institute and later was supported by the Shah for interest
28 exemption. The rule of law had faded, and Abbasabad had become an "exception". This
29 shift led to unintended consequences, such as corruption at ACMC. By the early 1970s,
30 the focus of development shifted from centralizing residential neighbourhoods, which was
31 a preference in the urban logic for a city with population growth, as the former Landowners
32 of Abbasanad, who were the militants, demanded that ("NLAI, No. 340000458,"). Even
33 the Comprehensive Plan, which suggested centralizing Abbasabad, also suggested an
34 alternative plan to transform it into a residential area (Farmanfarmaian & Victor Gruen
35 Architects, 1968b, p. 1_13), and even its plans are available (Figure 7).
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54 In the "Suspension" phase, all these urban logics were underestimated, and the will
55 for a bigger project was supported (Figure 8). The municipality changed its language to a
56 propaganda tone in the City Council and termed itself reliable for developing the project.
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4 However, their plans were still pragmatic and logical in size. The municipality became an
5 urban agent that wanted to participate in the centre of a political game. The second phase
6 for PNA was released, aligned with existing streets, and conformed to the topography.
7
8 However, it still followed some rules and barriers, financial plans, and a pragmatic
9 approach that government actors completely neglected. The Interior Minister belittled the
10 visions of the municipality towards the Plan as he knew that the municipality had no
11 utopian perspective towards the project previously.
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22 These political actors disregarded earthly realities and belittled those who accounted
23 for them. They criticized municipalities' actions, which had previously failed to make
24 progress. The situation became much more complex as the Queen and the Starchitects
25 entered the competition to design the project. Using a propaganda tone, the municipality
26 inevitably widened the project's plan atypically, which was the third phase of PNA.
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35 However, all these design-based rivalries ended as a new foreign property developer
36 intervened. However, negative earthly forces continued to hinder the progress of the
37 project's construction in Abbasabad. Despite the groundbreaking ceremony, the project
38 was officially suspended for two years, according to a government letter written during
39 the waning months of the Pahlavi ("NLAI, No. 230039313,"). The document cited a lack
40 of "manpower" and "building materials" as the primary reasons for the project's delay. The
41 foreign developer was not the "saviour" of the shah's demands, and the project remained
42 impossible.
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58 Conclusion

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4 Although utopia is partially presented as the opposite of reality, it should not be
5
6 misconstrued that utopian thinking lacks any logic; rather, it is influenced by metapolitics
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8 and meta-economics. For instance, in this case study, the influx of new ideas following
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10 the White Revolution, coupled with the country's better economic conditions and
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12 International diplomatic evolvments in the 1970s, allowed political actors to shape the
13
14 project while overlooking the negative concrete realities of the case study.
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19 The Municipality was the best actor who could resemble the shift towards meta-
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21 political imaginations, sacrificing urban-micro rationalities. Here, it can evidently divide
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23 logic into two main categories: The ordered one with meta-contextual values meant to
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25 create a utopian city. On the opposite side, urban logic was available, which considered
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27 the ordinary changes of the city and tried only to refine them and stay by them without
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29 creating a new reality.
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34 As it was tried to explain, the fundamental challenges of Abbasabad were
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36 permanently visible from the start. All were pragmatic and financial, with the concern of
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38 building it as soon as possible. The only actor who constantly addressed these challenges
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40 and wanted to minimize the constructions in favour of limits was the municipality. In
41
42 contrast, for many other players, Abbasabad was more like an imaginative existence than
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44 a concrete construction. It should be noted that in 1971, the 2500-year celebration was
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46 held, an extravagant ceremony reminiscing the utopian history of the Persian Empire.
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48 Consequently, it is not surprising that, at this moment, imagination plays a substantial role
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50 in politics.
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56 However, here, it is tried not to delve into plans and minimally narrate the politics to
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58 explain the reason for the shifts and other unseen actions. For instance, the Queen's
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4 intervention is another example that illustrates how the project's plans could not fully
5 convey the stories. Despite fundamental pragmatic and financial errors causing delays,
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7 the Queen attempted to support the starchitects in creating new plans. However, her
8
9 actions did not address the real reasons for the delays. Instead of working with the
10
11 municipality to alleviate the pragmatic causes for the delays, she created a new elegant
12
13 image for Abbasabad, which put the municipality in a much harsher situation as they were
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15 seen as rivals.
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22 Some argue that Queen had ideas contradicting those of other political players in
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24 discursive layers, which can justify her obsessive attention to the project's design and
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26 style. However, this article, it is trying to focus on the principle of exteriority rather than
27
28 delving into the "hidden core of discourse" or "the heart of the thought"; instead, we looked
29
30 "for its external conditions of existence"(Foucault, 1972, p. 229). In this view, the Queen's
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32 actions can be likened to a quote from Alice in Wonderland: "Imagination is the only
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34 weapon in the war against reality!"
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40 Eventually, in the mid-1970s, the municipality released the final plan of PNA, which
41
42 was a milestone for themselves, completely ignoring the barriers following the project in
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44 the imagination realm. The PNA's evolved plan was very similar to SPP in scaling (Figure
45
46 9). Even the general structure, a North-South axis, was completely alike, while some
47
48 components were relocated. This final plan reveals that by escaping from the realities,
49
50 after five years of mayorship, Nikpey could finally present a master plan which was
51
52 competent for the heart of the modern Persian Empire! On this occasion, the square of
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54 the PNA was even bigger than the final plan of SPP (Figure 10).
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4 As all the actors were looking for imaginations, the archives of these imaginations
5 were filtered. It is important to note that the archives containing the PNA are nearly non-
6 existent, and here, it was limited to a series of notes documents in the National Archives
7 of Iran, as the confidential documents are revealed in the new Islamic Republic regime
8 and a few newspaper reports which consisted of images. Even Kahn's and Tange's plans
9 would have been lost if the architects had not had archives for themselves. The only
10 widely publicized plan is the SPP, the final plan for the Pahlavi regime, which is widely
11 circulated and has high-quality publications.
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24 SPP is another piece of evidence that represents the unreliability of imagination and
25 plans in reality. SPP widely used a specific metaphorical language in line with the
26 mainstream language of Iranian architects at that time, following Iranian tradition, while
27 some sketches used this style (Figure 11). However, this image was only a distant dream
28 as the nominated project to design the City Hall, located near the main square of SPP,
29 was designed by Tange. Some critics claimed that the nominated project resembled more
30 of the Georges Pompidou Centre, an International avant-garde building, which
31 contradicted the Persian architectural style (Ganje Lou et al., 1978, Spring and Summer)
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44 It can be concluded (Figure 12) that the utopia here was limited to design, leading it
45 to an imaginative utopia with no trace on Earth. It seems an international trend that many
46 utopian constructions in the 20th century remained unsold worldwide. However, their
47 genealogies, visions, and shifts were different from each other, including inhibiting factors.
48 The most apparent factors were apparent in the site itself: The topography had left the
49 area unoccupied for years, and the high economics of the land in that neighbourhood,
50 which was visible in the adjacent neighbourhood, proved to be the primary obstacle,
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4 making it difficult to obtain land ownership, and practical limitations were too much for the
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6 municipality to overcome.
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10 The last negative actor was in the plans. While the first phase of the PNA was
11 released in March 1966, in September 1974, no one would probably remember it as the
12 third PNA was introduced. In that session, it was announced that the southern lands of
13
14 Nezami Street had been bought till then ("Details of Abbasabad construction plan," 1974).
15
16 In other words, within 8.5 years, the only lands being acquired were the realm of the initial
17
18 phase of PNA, which consisted of only a quarter of one million square meters. However,
19
20 the new plan introduced by SPP a year later was over twenty times larger than this area.
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22 As a result, the growing imagination was the most important negative actor!
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Figures:

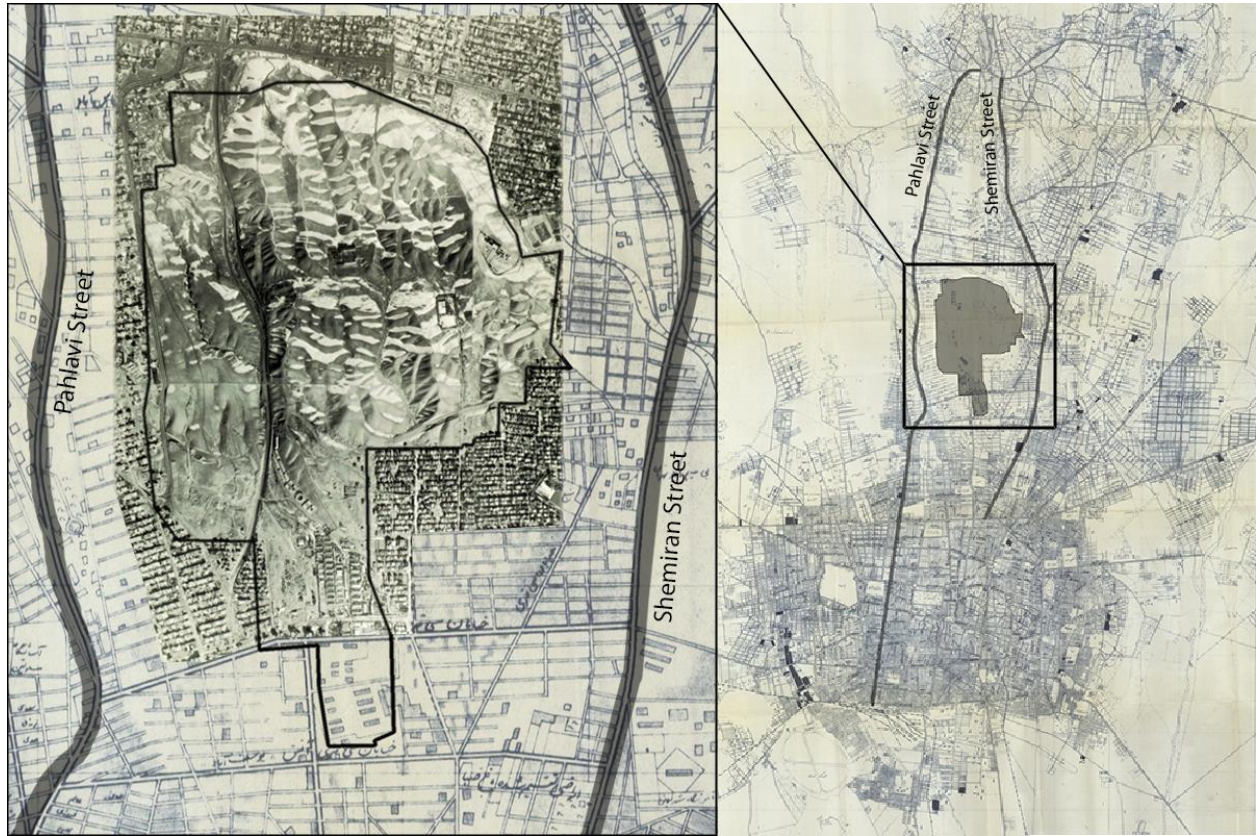


Figure 1: Abbasabad's Position with the City and two major North-South Streets, including the natural topography of the city. Source of based map: (Tehran Municipality General Technical Department, 1963, July 23). Source of topographical image: (Llewelyn Davies International, 1976a, p. 46). Editions: Author.

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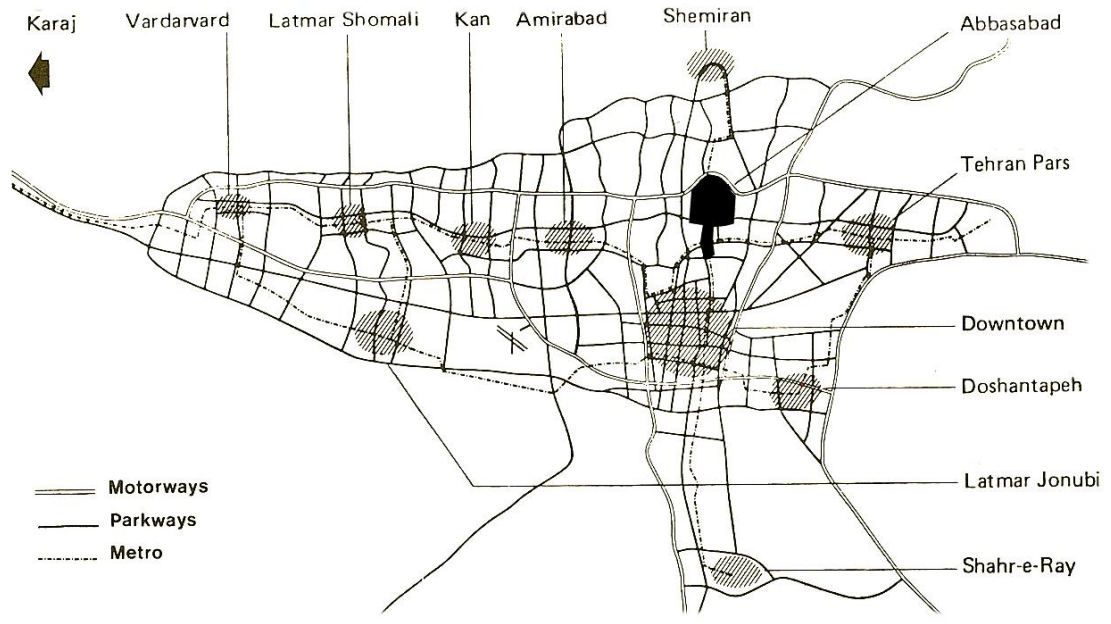


Figure 2: New Tehran according to the Comprehensive Plan. Abbasabad is the new central district. Source: (NLAI, No.340000458, p. 14). Editions: Author.

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Figure 3: Model prepared by the municipality, Source: Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission as cited in (Emami, 2014, p. 76).

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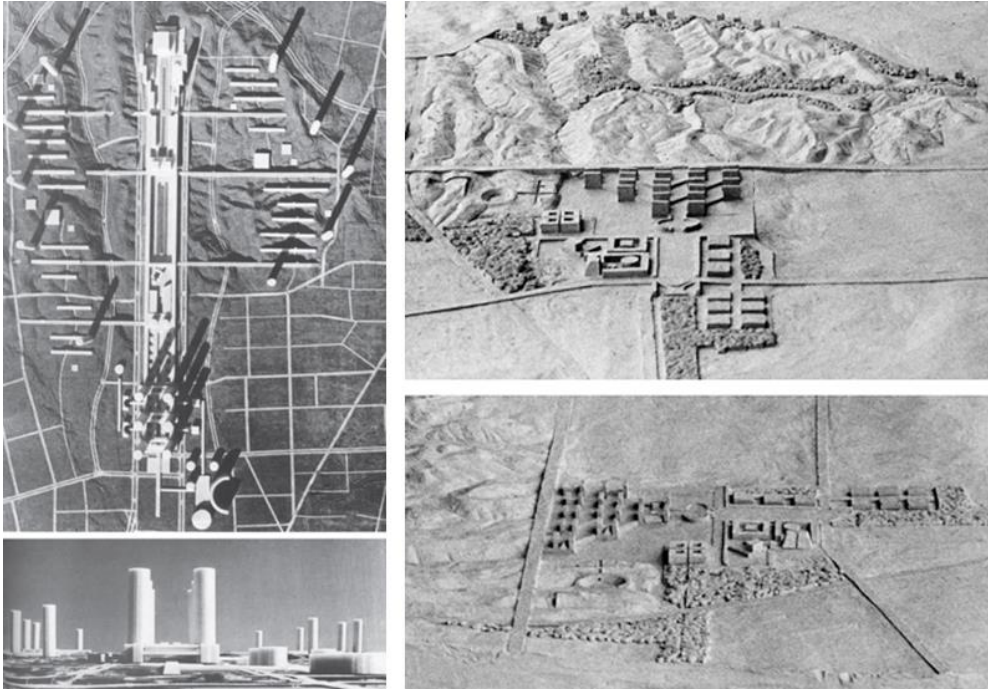


Figure 4: Right: Initial Proposal of Louis Kahn. Source: Personal Archive of the architect (Emami, 2011, p. 58).
Left: Initial Proposal of Kenzo Tange. Source: (Emami, 2014, p. 78).

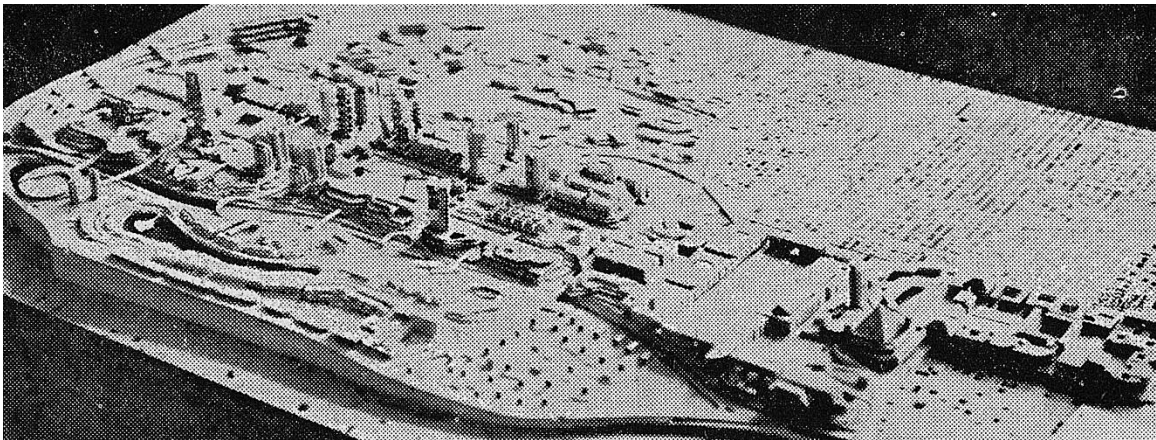


Figure 5: New model for Abbasabad represented by the Municipality. Source: ("14 ministries will be built in Abbasabad," 1974).

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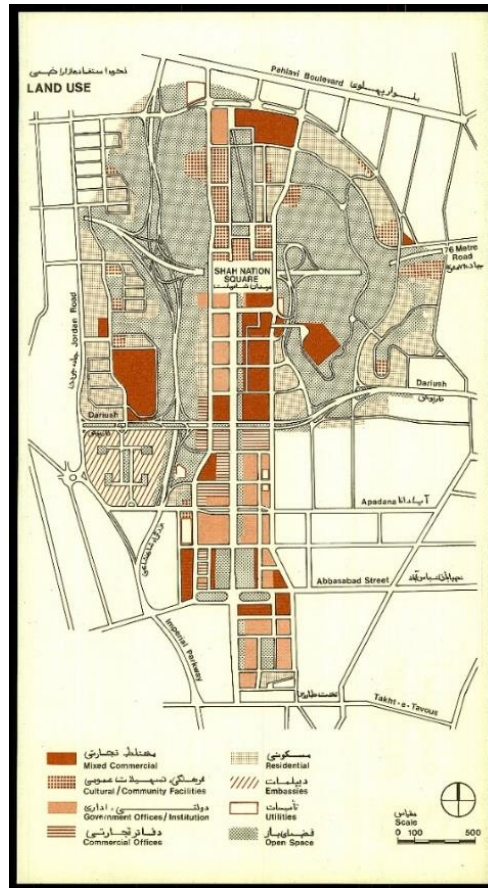


Figure 6: SPP. Source: ("NLAI, No. 264025073,").



Figure 7: Alternative plan for Abbasabad suggested in the Comprehensive Plan, becoming a residential neighbourhood. Source: (Farmanfarmaian & Victor Gruen Architects, 1968b, p. 1_13).

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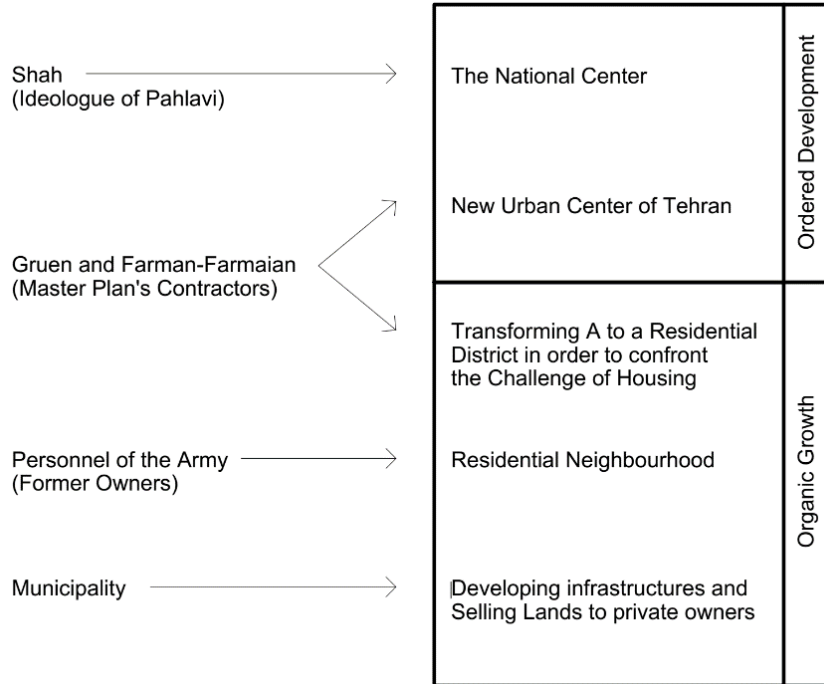


Figure 8: parallel prospects to Abbasabad in the 1960s.

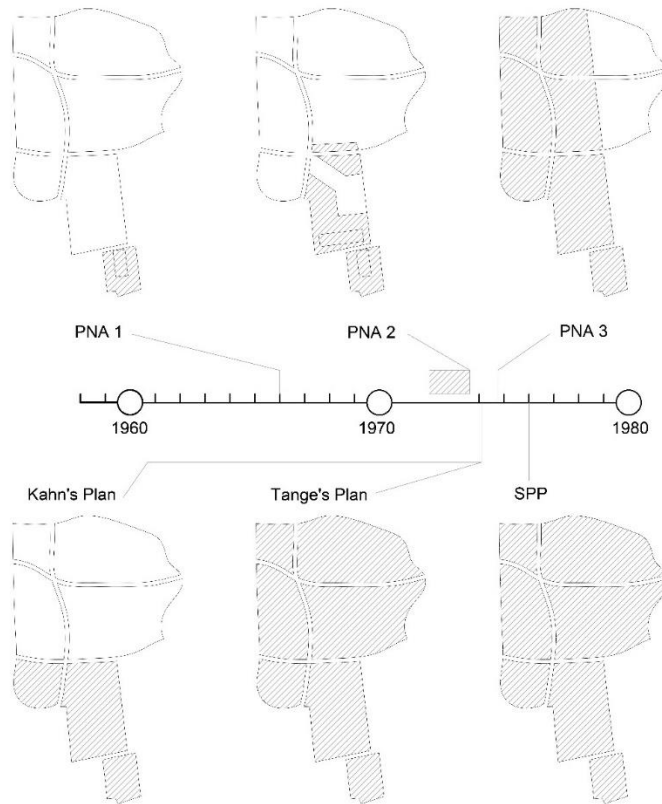


Figure 9: Abbasabad's Master Plans and their scales.

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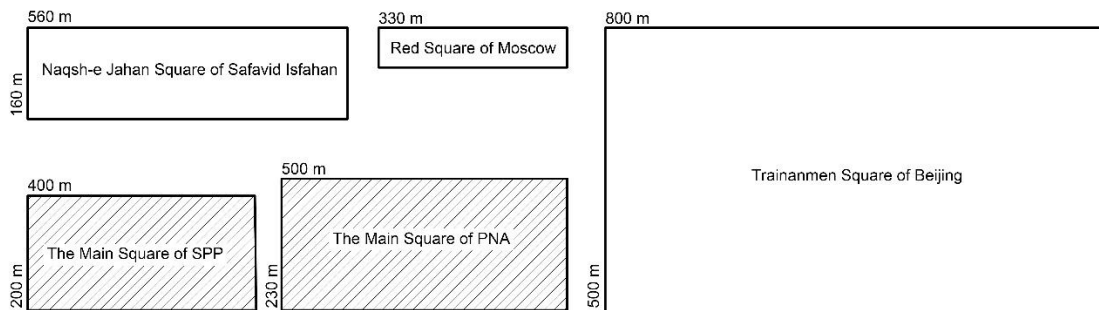


Figure 10: The comparison of sizes between the main squares of Abbasabad and other well-known squares.

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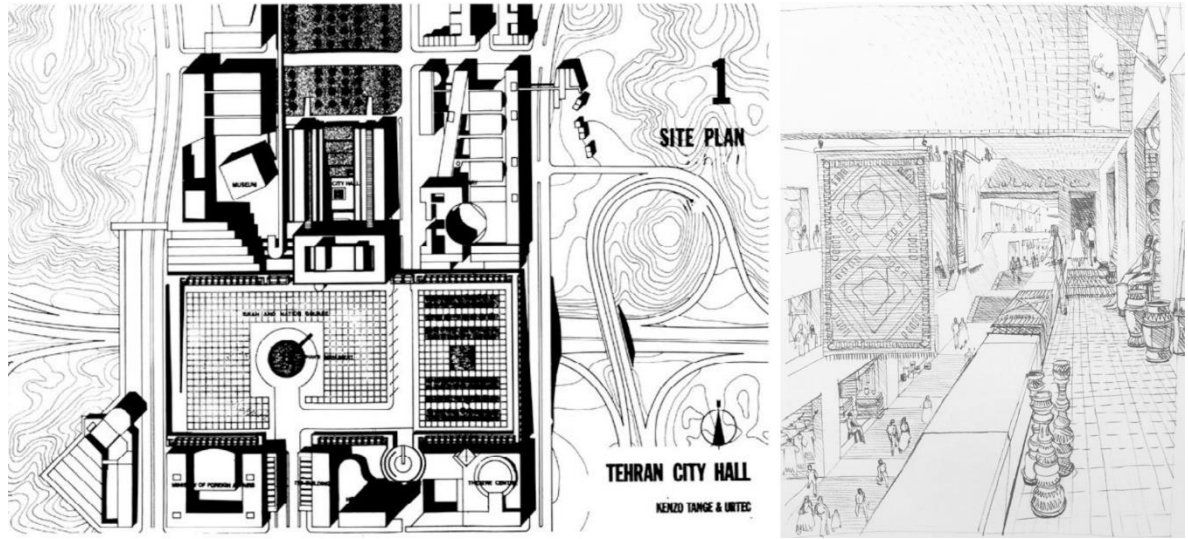


Figure 11: Left: Tange's Nominated Plan for Tehran's City Hall in 1978 (Ganje Lou et al., 1978, Spring and Summer). Right: A Sketch in SPP (Llewelyn Davies International, 1976b, p. 54)

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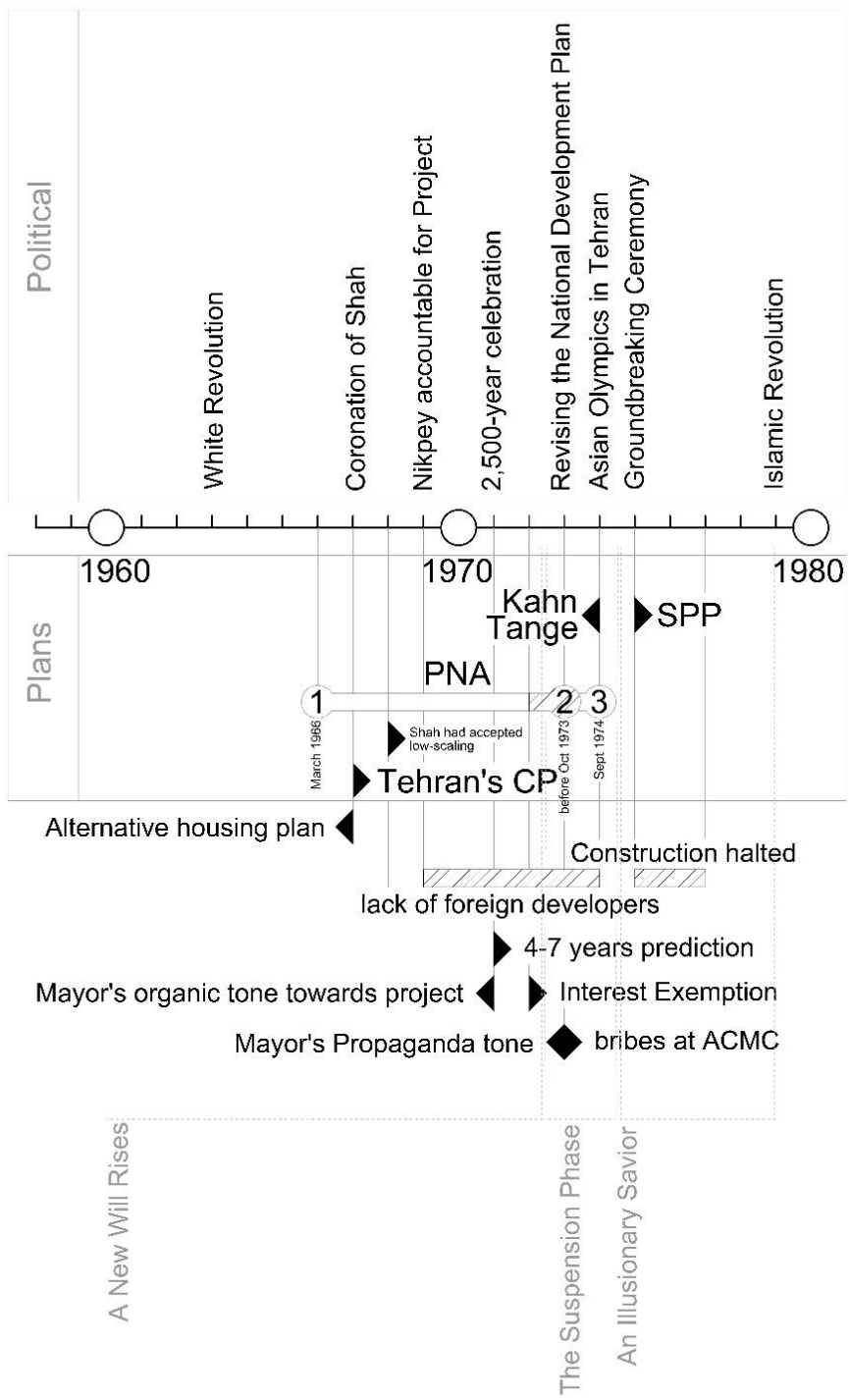


Figure 12: Summary; of Abbasabad, its Plans, political actions, and some unmentioned information.

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