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Lalehzar: the Front Line of Tehran's Modernization (The Street as the Modernity Diffusion Frame from the City into the Society)

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Abstract

Problem statement: A new vision toward the society at the Qajar era is coinciding with the modernization movement in the world; The construction of Lalehzar street is one of the first governmental actions in Iran to join this line. The idea claimed is that the lived history of Lalehzar street is a precise reflection of the modern definition which transformed it from a garden street into an urban public space. The changes in the facades of buildings, the installation of urban furniture, paving of roads and the strengthening of street functionalities such as the construction of hotels, cafes and theaters are among the significant facts of this process. Lalehzar street, which was first built in the Qajar era in order to create a place of leisure in the city for courtiers and financiers, was transformed into a public space for residents during the first Pahlavi period and allowed people to devote time and to participate in the flow of urban life.

Research objective: Reading the perceptual role of the urban modernization process in the formation of modern Tehran's society under the 1st Pahlavi, based on the physical developments of Lalehzar street.

Research method: By distinguishing four interventions being "decoration", "alignment", "facadization" and "monumentalization" considered as the main measures of urban modernization, Lalehzar Street is examined through an iconographic approach and the hints of the interventions mentioned are analyzed in it.

Conclusion: The emergence of an "urban ambiance" rising from the modernization of rue Lalehzar which is different from the general culture of the society; As well as the fact that modernization in Iran began with rue Lalehzar, define the main results of the research.

Keywords: Moderation, Street, Tehran, Lalehzar, Urban Ambiance.

Introduction

Modernization is one of the most noticeable expressions at the close of the nineteenth century, when industrialization and urbanization marked the end of the traditional understanding of society. The Urban modernization refers to the process initiated and achieved in which, at a very moment in history, an urban society acquires an advanced level on

sciences, techniques, production power, social uses and urban management and is able to improve the urban life quality (Guanging, 1996).

The city, with its multiple characteristics, may not be the first modernization platform, but it is certainly the most influential. In other words, it is in the city that the modernization process is apprehended. Since the first economic, social and cultural manifestations of modernity have been crystallized in the street

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(Berman, 2018), changes toward urban modernization began from the street in most developed or developing countries. Thanks to the global perception it offers from the city, this component of the urban landscape offers the possibility of faster and deeper interventions. With the establishment of the Qajar dynasty at the end of the eighteenth century in Iran, the first steps towards modernization of the state took shape with “the establishment of a modern army” (Karvar, 2004, 64). Likewise, the reforming chancellor Amir-Kabir set up a training school for New Administrative Elites inspired by the model of the Moscow Military Academy in 1851, the Dâr-al Fonun (the house of techniques) where Western specialists teaching modern medicine, languages, surgery and physical sciences (Farman, 1968).

It was at this time that Iranian¹ society became familiar with the new concept of “the street” in the urban space. Before that, the street had another meaning for Iranians ; A concept linked to myth, to the sense and to holiness. It is perhaps the importance of this concept and its position which has guided an important governmental decision about the society, that is to say the modernization, towards the street; Because the equivalent of this word in Persian is passage [gozar] and its semantic dimensions are explained in the urban literature of the Iranian traditional era, and that the mutation from “passage” to “street” is considered an powerful cause in the evolution of society.

Litteratyre Review

Since Lalehzar street is known as a symbol of modernization in Iran, the reproduction of the scenes and images of its life during the Qajar and Pahlavi eras are abundantly found in litterature, arts and social fields. Some examples include movies such as the “Hive” (Goleh, 1975) and “Jahan-Pahlavan Takhti” (Hatami & Afkhami, 1997); series like “Hezardastan” (1988) or the 10th night (Fathi & Beshkofeh, 2001); documentaries as “Eight hundred feet in Lalehzar” (Sharif Mousavi & Bahrami, 2004) and “Images of a City, today’s Tehran” (Sinaei, 1977) and also literary works like Scattered memories (Taraghi, 1992).

Furthermore, the researches on the developments of Lalehzar Street can be classified into two general groups. The one is focusing on the urban developments in Qajar and Pahlavi eras and the beginning of Iranian modernity (Pakzad, 2016), the emergence of Modernity in Iran and the mutations in the concept of the city (Kiani, 2004; Bani Masoud, 2009); these studies concentrate especially on the concepts of street construction and formation. The other group dicusses on the evolution of urban policies and the organizational and structural transformations (Bemanian, 2006; Shabani & Kamyab, 2012), the historical development of modernity in the Iranian society (Pouladvand, 2010; Habibi & Ahari, 2008); these researches are deepening rather on the physical and morphological aspects of the street.

This study tries to elaborate an innovative interpretation of Lalehzar street by involving a phenomenological vision and by focusing on the urban modernization process of Tehran.

Methodology and Research Theories

This is a theoretical – historical analysis in the fields of urban modernization policies. In order to have a clear understanding of the issue, it is necessary to outline the reflection of urban modernization in Tehran. Therefore, the modernization aspects of Lalehzar Street are read through an iconographic analysis.

The reason for choosing this street lies in the developments related to the modern era of Tehran; Lalehzar, in fact, is the pioneer of urban modernization in Iran as well as its pride. Dealing with the meaning of what is known as “modern”, the formation of the term “urban modernization”, and the explanation of street modernization criteria make the theoretical body of the research.

Assuming that Lalehzar Street is the frontline element of modernization in Tehran, this process will be analyzed and evaluated by explaining the four fundamental interventions of “decoration”, “alignment”, “facadisation” and “monumentalization” as dispositifs.

• The street modernization

The idea of “modernization” refers to “modernity”, “a relationship to passing time” (Borot, 2001, 186). The adjective “modernus” according to Jauss (1998) who traced its history, appears in Low Latin at the end of the fifth century, and comes from “modo”, meaning right at the moment, but also now, at the present time and designates what is present, current, contemporary with the speaker (and not necessarily what is new). The “modernity” substantive which appears with Balzac in 1823 (Losada, 2005, 150), is a characteristic mode of civilization which is opposed to the mode of tradition. The term is born in the middle of the nineteenth century and remains “a relatively confused notion, which globally connotes a whole historical development and a change in mentality” (Baudrillard, 1992, 552). Therefore, modernization is a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to economic and technical development and affects the mental evolution and the cultural development, above all.

The syntagm ‘urban modernization’ would be understood as an approach consisting in revitalizing cities, by giving particular importance to the arts, architecture and culture which are structuring elements of the urban landscape recomposition (Miles & Paddison, 2005), sometimes diverting attention from reality in favor of a desired image (Belina & Helms, 2003). Also, the modernization of cities, in addition to the development of industry and the improvement of the wealth production force, is due to the desire to put forward an image of the city, more beautiful, more attractive, more pleasant (Ethier & Margier, 2019). A perfect example of the urban modernization is the city of Paris under the reign of Napoleon III, who assigned the task of adapting Paris to modern society and to its new needs to Baron Eugène Haussmann. The mission (Fig. 1) that he will entrust to Haussmann is described as “Embellished Paris, Enlarged Paris, Purified Paris” (Poutissou, 2008). This process, which has occurred contemporary with structural

changes in other European cities, is reflected in four types of interventions known as modernization dispositifs; That aim the improvement of street dignity from the traditional era to the Modern one:

- Decoration

According to the aesthetic terminology, any composition of patterns, or any organization of elements added to an object or a space to embellish and decorate it, is considered a decoration. The terms ornament and decoration are often used interchangeably referring to the embellishment of architecture and urban environment (Riisberg & Munch, 2015). Brett sees decoration and ornament as a family of practices devoted mainly to visual pleasure and defines it as values including social recognition and perceptual satisfaction (Brett, 2005).

- Alignment

According to Anne Souriau, this word is defined as the arrangement of elements organized in a straight line. The term originally belongs to the technical and administrative vocabulary of urban



Fig. 1. Basse des Ursins Street before the actual Arcolle piercing street, 4th district of Paris, 1853. In the picture, details such as floor paving, surface water channel, street lighting, and metal bases with lamp motifs are among the most important measures of Haussmann. Source: <https://viewer.slv.vic.gov.au/?entity=IE7061353>

roads. But it literally appeared in spatial arts and is described as the alignment of constructions in architecture and urbanism; the alignment of plants in gardening: the alignment of trees, flowerbeds, and the arrangement of the vast perspectives of the French-style parks (Souriau, 1999). Also, Le Corbusier believes that men walk straight and donkeys move crookedly.

- Facadisation

According to the French historian Pierre Pinon, it was Jean-Charles Moreux, architect, who invented facadism in 1941 to enhance the insalubrious ilets, in the historic district of the city. He proposed to keep the facades but to destroy and rebuild the interiors to enhance these dilapidated parts of the city (Moreux, 1941). We can also admit that the measures to protect the facades around Vosges Square and Dauphine Square during the reign of Louis XIII, as well as the construction of Rivoli Street during the time of Napoleon the Ist, are similar to measures of heritage-oriented façadism. The act of façadisation dissociates the content of the building and makes the city difficult to read (Pumain et al., 2006).

- Monumentalization

It is about a structure, often a work of architecture or a sculpture, dedicated to perpetuate the memory of a person or an event or to celebrate particular rites or beliefs. It designates a specific landmark or a focus point characterized by at least one, or an exceptional, aesthetic feature in an urban fabric (Souriau, 1999).

• Lalehzar street²: The symbol of Tehran's modernization

Ernest Orsolle, a Belgian tourist who traveled to Iran in 1885, describes Lalehzar as well paved with planted trees on both sides of the street, along water streams ... He describes a beautiful and easy-to-access public garden in it. He also refers to a bust of the Shah used to be in the middle of this garden on a small circular plinth which is now removed by order of fanatical mullahs (Orsolle, 1885, 110-113).

Heinrich Brugsch, a German orientalist who came to Tehran at the end of Nasser al-Din Shah's reign, described Lalehzar Street as an urban space (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2. Lalehzar entrance from Sepah Square in the late Qajar era. At the end of the Qajar era, an entrance gate was added to the north side of Sepah Square, facing Lalehzar where horse-drawn carriages passed through. The gate walls and the shops were decorated with geometric embellishments to create visual diversity on the facade. The most important function of the gate walls was to create a focal point, directing the user's eyes to the opening of the new street. Here, the entrance gate was built to differentiate between two public urban spaces (the square and the street) instead of distinguishing the public spaces from private spaces. It seems that this intervention aimed to give value to the space behind the entrance gate: Lalehzar Street. Source: Tahami & Abrishami, 2007.

where men and women stroll separately along the tree-lined Street. He notices groups of women covered in veils, sit on the green grass and close to the flower bushes to inhale the fresh spring air and some others sit by the water stream and enjoy watching the water flow (Habibi & Ahari, 2008, 12). After the reign of Nasser al-Din Shah and up until the end of the Qajar era, some boutiques were built on the street which sold the latest fashion items, such as the Comptoir that sold European goods, the French house, the Dutch trading house and a post office. The architectural style in this period is noticeable in the Grand Hotel (Fig. 3), located in a courtier's garden-house with a European style and was a residence for foreign travelers, Persian traditional music concerts and plays (Boroumandi, 2008, 18-20).

Although the construction of piercing streets³ was on the governmental agenda with the first Pahlavi (1920-1940), Lalehzar Street stayed as the Shah's main priority despite being a Qajar street. Jacques Hardouin, a French traveler who visited Iran in 1925, describes Lalehzar as a street of greater length than width; the street view



Fig. 3. The Grand Hotel building on Lalehzar street, late Qajar era. Being designed in an outstanding architectural style, Grand Hotel was built on Lalehzar Street for housing foreign ambassadors in the late Qajar era. The building entrance has a striking design with elegant details, including the adorned coupled columns and their top embellishments, the entrance arch and its Persian and Latin header texts, the projected neoclassical balcony roofing the entrance and defining the entrance boundaries, and the decorative geometric details of the building facade on both sides of the balcony. This building is considered as a symbol of facadism due to its distinctive architectural elements and demonstrates a new urban construction style. Source: <http://abgineharch.ir/2020/08/07/گنگی-بر-روزهای-شکو-للهزار-اند-هتل>

creates an impression that makes the observers think it straightly directs to the Towchal mountain snows. The frequent movement of carriages and pedestrians on this street makes it look like the French quarters ([Kariman, 1976](#)).

Two months after Reza-Shah came to power, Lalehzar was described in a special issue of the "National Geographic Magazine" entitled "The Tehrani, which was handed over to the army chief" in May 1921 written by Bird, who taught in the American college in Tehran for five years. The text makes a connection between Lalehzar Street and the Fifth Avenue in New York and people are proud of it. Young people and fashionable Iranians tranquilly strolling along this street in the evenings and a few Armenians dressed up in European clothes are described in the landscape of Lalehzar Street. Iranian women are rarely seen on the street and the only ones, wear long black veils and high heels. People who spend their evenings on Lalehzar enjoy eating roasted peanuts, beets, rose-flavored ice cream and other things that vendors sell. According to historical texts,

on one corner, a magician displays a trick and on the other, a professional narrator draws people's attention. These scenes give the impression that "a carnival has entered the city, whereas these are ordinary scenes of daily life in Lalehzar Street" (Nikrouh, 2012).

Various European-style cafe popular with intellectuals took place on the street ([Tarah-e samandehi, behsazi va nosazi-ye khiyaaban-haye Lalehzar va Ferdosi, 2010](#)); these urban activities led to the emergence of a new culture that continued until the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905 to 1911). Between the end of Nasser al-Din Shah's reign and the Constitutional Revolution, the bourgeoisie class emerged in Iran as an outcome of modernization. The bourgeoisie and the Europeans who lived in Tehran expected to have a public space with traces of western modernized habits such as cafés, restaurants, boutiques and hotels and Lalehzar was the ideal place for realizing these modern wishes. Theaters, printing offices ([Fig. 4](#)), luxury boutiques and cafés are the appearance of new significant uses on this street.



Fig. 4. Faros printing house on Lalehzar street, Qajar era. Faros printing house on Lalehzar street has a remarkable architectural style. The building façade makes a distinction between the projected entrance and the building structure. In addition, various details such as the coupled columns on both sides of the entrance, the projected balcony, the railings, the facade brickwork, the geometric embellishments of the parapets and the triangular decorations above the window frames, make this building a perfect aesthetic object in the heart of Lalehzar street. Source: isna.ir/xdNg3Z

At the end of the first Pahlavi era, the southern Lalehzar became the center of recreational and artistic activities. Reza-Shah ordered to extend this street from Shah-Abad Street to the north so that it intersects with Shahreza⁴ Street. The new extended street was named Lalehzar-Now (the New Lalehzar) and became the official point of recreation pursuits for the upper class of Tehran. At that time, the street was flanked by stores, hotels, cinemas and theaters, confectioneries, florists, music schools, and cafes that brought it prosperity. By the royal order, the street appearance was transformed, the gate arches were removed and replaced by two-story buildings. The owners of the buildings on both sides of the street were obliged to build at least a two-story facade with installed doors and windows like a complete building (Kiani, 2004, 12). Pars café and Nast theater are among the major buildings of this era (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Nasr Theater facade and Tehran Theater in the late Qajar era. Designing significant entrances became a popular practice in the urban planning practices of this period. Important buildings like government buildings and intellectuals' hubs, such as theaters, cinemas, and hotel-restaurants, had splendidly designed entrances. Nasr Theater building is a good example that had a magnificent entrance. The embossed statue of an angel, the curved projected canopy, the entrance lighting, the glass vitrine displaying movie posters and prints, the recessed entrance with a few stairs and the theater signs deliberately projected from the building are some of the new features added to this building. Source: <https://ettelaat.com/0005mp>

Discussion

Lalehzar Street is the brilliance of urban modernization in Iran during the first years of the 20th century (Fig. 6). The application of modernization dispositifs on this street led to the emergence of urban ambiances which creates together, the originality of modernization; This issue being the ultimate wish of the government:

- Arouse a feeling of collective admiration among the population through innovation in construction.
- Producing the spatial experience of an interactive life in an urban environment merits to the activities proposed and the current functionalities.
- Creating the common pleasure of observing the city's natural landscape based on a perspective at a specially created point to frame the mountains.
- Inducing the presence of a central authority by the establishment of historical buildings which have never existed before in public space.

The most important achievement of these interventions is the mutation of the street that becomes a "public space"; "One of the possible spaces for the social practice of individuals, characterized by its public status" (Levy & Lussault, 2013, 333).

Conclusion

Lalehzar Street is the gateway to Tehran's modernization and consequently, all the country. Although from the middle of the Qajar period, the government tried to import the symbols of modernization into the society, but Lalezar Street was its the frontline. The mutation of the street from a natural private promenade (Nasser al-Din Shah), passing through an intellectual public one (late Qajar) to a western-similar modernized public space (first Pahlavi) clearly draws the entry, the development and the institutionalization of the urban modernization in Iran. The combination of political and social affairs in Lalehzar

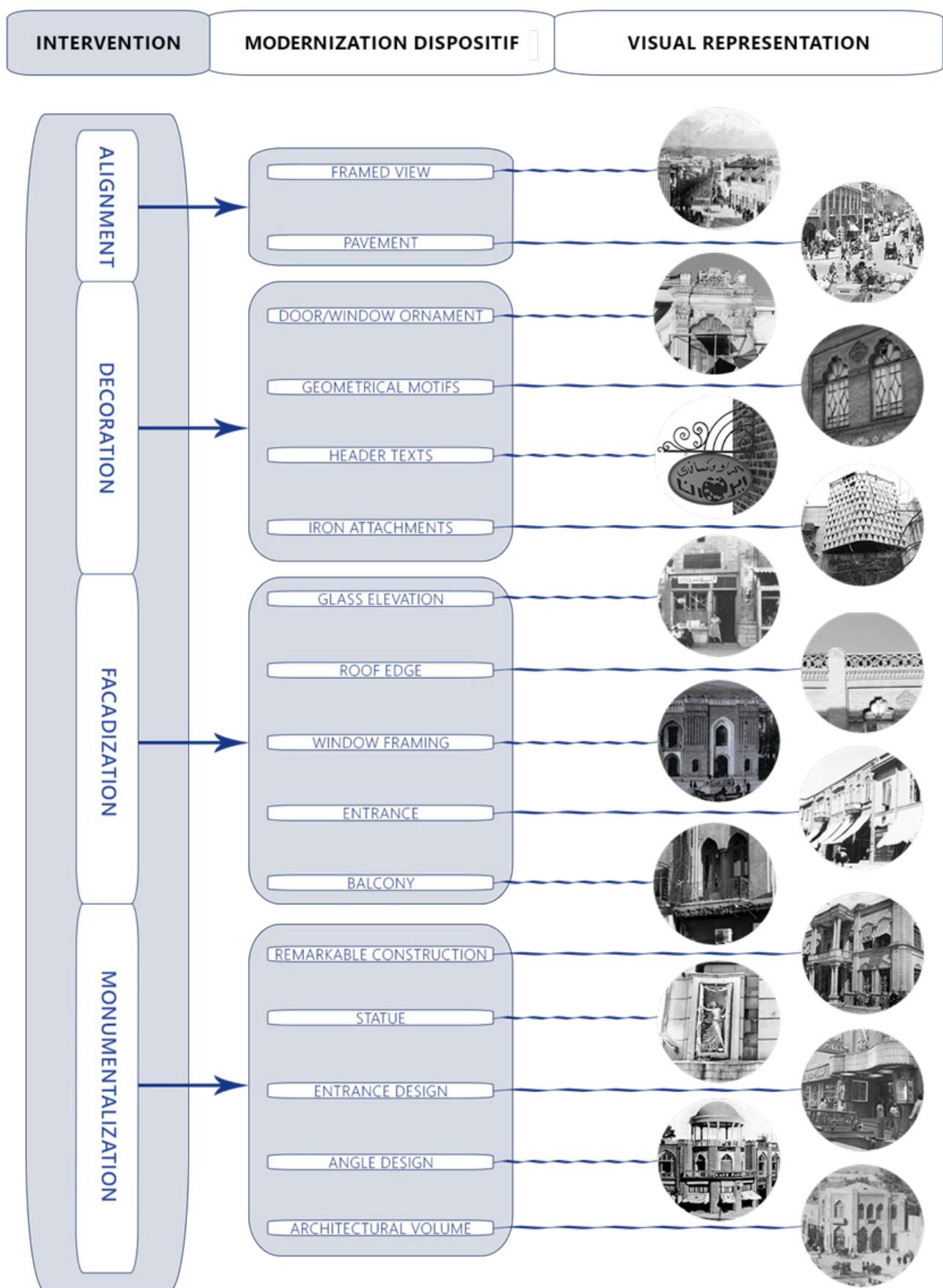


Fig. 6. Visual framing of the modernization dispositifs in Lalehzar Street. Souce: Author.

Street encouraged public activities, thereby diminishing the particular aspects of aristocratic concepts. During the Constitutional Revolution from the 1905s, Lalehzar became the gathering point for political debates, numerous theaters including the National Theater, Dehghan Theater, Nasr Theater, Pars Theater and later, the Hafez-Now and Yas Theaters, were built in late Qajar and early Pahlavi eras and all kinds of fashion and cultural products shops were transforming this street into the bed of a growing modernization in the Iranian capital. As a modernized urban element at the time, Lalehzar street became a fertile bed for the display of new trends in architectural, artistic, social, cultural and even political approaches (Fig. 7).

Lalehzar's urban landscape which is a description of its modernized character, seems a "mise-en-scène";

In this stage design, the street in no longer just an urban component but like a catalyst, it is the diffusion frame of modernity from urban components into the society. In other words, the path to the modernization of urban audience's life is oriented through the street: a maximum adaptation between the society cultural conditions and the functionalities of the buildings or the social activities, in line with attractivity characteristic of the space, draw the principle face of Lalehzar street in this process. Perhaps it could be affirmed that the modernized landscape of Lalehzar which is interpreted as a symbol for the changes in the urban ambiance and the headway forward, is the source of its significance for the urban management with the 2nd Pahlavi and even after the Iranian Islamic Revolution (1979).



Fig. 7. The modernization process of Lalehzar Street from its foundation to the 2nd Pahlavi era. Source: Author.

Endnotes

1. See Atashinbar and Motdayen, 2019.
2. Nasser al-Din Shah's inspiration from the Parisian model of the Champs-Elysées to build the Lalehzar garden, highlighted in many sources, is interpreted only as an association: "Association refers to a mental connection between concepts, events, or mental states that usually stems from specific experiences." (Klein, 2012) Thus, no physical similarity can be observed between Lalehzar and the Champs-Elysées. (For more, see Atashinbar and Nedaei Fard, 2022).
3. For more, see Atashinbar, 2015.
4. "Shahreza" is one of the main streets of the first Pahlavi era, built in the former location of the [destroyed] Naseri fortifications. Tehran University and the Municipality Café (a very original café of its time) were located on this street. The Pahlavi government named this street after the Shah to emphasize its importance. Nevertheless, after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, this street took the name of the country's most important historical event, 'Enghelab-e Eslami' (the Islamic Revolution) street. This naming emphasizes the significant structural role of this street.

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