

Original Research Article

Neglecting the Role of Green Landscape as a Place-Maker, a Main Factor in the Inefficiency of Development in the City of Natanz*

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Abstract | The expansion of urbanization and the increasing development of cities lead to a need for human connection with nature more than ever before, and urban green space is developing in step with the city. Despite the increase in the area of contemporary green space, its inefficiency and failure to meet the various needs of citizens are evident. Understanding spatial capacities and residents' perception of the surrounding green space will lead to understanding the place-making components of the native green landscape. The Natanz garden city also has its own spatial capacities, and the present study has analyzed the characteristics of the various green typologies of Natanz to understand these components through library documents and field observations through landscape reading. The results showed that the traditional green typologies of Natanz, including the garden city and green oases, were created according to the needs of residents and the capacities of the place by creating order with an emphasis on selected elements, and by having a close connection with the daily life and mentalities of residents, they meet their needs in various social, cultural, aesthetic, economic, and environmental aspects. While contemporary green typologies, including urban parks and public green spaces, have been limited to purely decorative and recreational functions in an unsustainable and incompatible way with residents' perceptions of place and have no place in the residents' mindsets, it is essential to pay attention to the place-making components of the green landscape in development plans to increase the efficiency of green space and transform it into a green landscape.

Keywords | *Green Landscape, Place-based Development, Garden City.*

Introduction | Urban development in various dimensions has led to extensive changes in the structure of cities and the lifestyle of city residents. These changes have created different needs in the city, one of which is the need for green space and connection with nature. In the process of urban development, urban green space has also been developed to a certain extent, but in practice, it is not efficient and does not succeed in meeting the needs of residents. One of the reasons for this inefficiency of contemporary green space is the incompatibility of development with the capacities of the place. In

development plans, the green space development pattern imitates European models and is implemented almost identically in different cities in Iran. This is because each of the cities of Iran has its own specific spatial capacities, which determine the type of green space development in those cities. The physical and one-dimensional attitude towards trees has led to the construction of inefficient green spaces in marginal and less important parts of the city, which are unsuccessful in meeting the needs of residents. However, the native green space of the Natanz City Garden is a different type of contemporary green space with a recreational and decorative function. Its multiple functions in people's lives, including economic, environmental, social, aesthetic, and identity, indicate its dignity and importance in the minds of residents. The constant connection and linking of trees with

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people's daily lives has turned them into a landscape element, and green space has taken on a role beyond a decorative element, and, as a green landscape, plays a fundamental role in the formation of a place. Ignoring the place-making role of green landscape in development plans has reduced it to an ineffective contemporary green space. Natanz's green landscape is part of the identity of this city and plays different roles in its various forms. Understanding the characteristics of Natanz's green landscape and its place-making components leads to a deeper understanding of its role in people's lives and its importance in the development process. Understanding these characteristics and components requires understanding the residents' perception of the place, which is possible through reading the landscapes. Reading the landscapes of Natanz Garden City leads to understanding the typologies of its green landscape and the role of each of these typologies in people's lives, and how they create places.

Research Questions

- What role does the green landscape of Natanz play in the development process of this city?
- What are the place-making components of the green landscape of Natanz?

Research Method

Given that the nature of the present study is to discover and understand the place and its capacities, therefore, the method of this study is also qualitative and exploratory, using field observations and existing library documents. After field observations and visits to different parts of the study area, the components evaluated in the study were analyzed and examined according to the theoretical foundations of landscape and place. Understanding the characteristics and capacities of a place, given its objective-subjective nature, is only possible through a holistic approach. The method of reading the green landscape used in the present study is landscape reading, which follows the landscape approach. In this approach, which considers the objectivity and subjectivity of the city to be inseparable, the perception and mind of the residents are considered the main factors in understanding the landscape (Majidi et al., 2019). Landscape reading is a territorial reading that goes beyond political geography and is a necessary condition for a general understanding of the place (Hosseinzadeh et al., 2024). The characteristics and capacities of the Natanz green landscape were identified through landscape reading, and by applying these field observations to the theoretical foundations of landscape and place, the place-making components of the Natanz green landscape were introduced.

Theoretical Foundations

• Green landscape and urban development

Because landscape is an objective-subjective phenomenon and dependent on the presence of the audience in the place, urban green space also includes the same feature as part of the landscape; therefore, the greenness of urban space with a landscape approach is also called "green landscape" (Khorrarmrouei et al., 2025). The expansion of cities, the development of man-made spaces, and the reduction of natural spaces in the human living environment have had environmental, social, and identity consequences in cities, therefore, urban green networks have been considered and developed not only as a green spot but also as a factor for improving the quality of urban life and one of the main structures of the city, and this development has affected the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the city landscape (Saboonchi et al., 2018). Green landscape as a part of the urban landscape has many effects on various aspects of citizens' lives, and the development of green landscape in line with the development of the city requires recognition of these effects, the capacities of the place, and the needs of the residents. Therefore, the mere quantitative development of green space as a decorative element with a recreational function in the development process is a factor in its inefficiency (Abdi et al., 2024). Green spaces that are not related to other city structures and the city as a whole and lack integration and coherence, both physically and semantically, are considered poor-quality and undesirable spaces (Saboonchi et al., 2018). Place-based development is a type of development that pays attention to the capacities of the place and the residents' perception of the place. The prerequisite for place-based development is the reading of landscapes, in which the reader reads the elements and components of the landscape through a holistic approach by recognizing and considering the totality of the phenomenon and presenting a cognition that is consistent with reality (Hosseinzadeh et al., 2024). Therefore, urban development and green landscape are closely related to each other. The development of green landscape occurs in parallel with the development of the city, and development without considering the residents' perception of green landscape and their needs in relation to the place will lead to the inefficiency of urban green space.

• Garden city landscape

To create a peaceful and comfortable environment, citizens' interaction with nature, and create a sustainable urban landscape, Iranians created the Iranian Sharbagh or Garden City. Sharbaghs, as the foundation of the Iranian city, have created a sustainable and dynamic

city by taking advantage of environmental factors, which are formed through the interactions of natural elements of water and plants with architectural bodies (Sheybani & Esmaeeldokht, 2016). Therefore, water, plants, and the same triad that is the essence of the Iranian landscape and city (Mansouri and Javadi, 2018), are also the basis for the formation of Sharbagh or Garden City. The landscape of traditional Iranian cities, while adapting to the natural environment, has responded to the emotional, cultural, and ecological needs of citizens, and this factor has led to the sustainability of the relationship between humans and the city (Sheybani, 2010). The foundation and basis for the formation of Garden City is also this interaction between humans and the environment, and meeting the needs of citizens in various aspects of urban life. The role of the Iranian landscape triad is not limited to the role of physical elements, but the inseparable connection of this triad is deeply rooted in Iranian culture, customs, rituals, and beliefs of Iranians and has always had a strong presence in people's daily lives throughout history (Mansouri & Javadi, 2019). Sharbaghs are formed through the combination of waterways and green infrastructures, and the organic formation of architectural bodies among this natural combination, in other words, green corridors corresponding to waterways are considered the main structure of the formation of the city (Sheybani & Esmaeeldokht, 2016). Therefore, given that the main structure of Sharbagh is formed by natural elements, especially gardens, the role of the green landscape in the garden city has received more attention than ever before, and identifying its structure and characteristics in the development process is essential.

Case Study

Natanz is one of the historical cities of Iran, a city of Isfahan province, located at a geographical location of 51 degrees east longitude and 33 degrees north latitude with an area of more than 3397 square kilometers (Mohammadi et al., 2021). The suitable natural and climatic conditions of the Natanz region, its location relative to the two strategic cities of Kashan and Isfahan, the position of this region in the communication network from the south to the central plateau of Iran, and its location relative to the Rey-Isfahan highway are among the reasons for the importance of this region throughout history (Mohammadi et al., 2022). Although Natanz city is located in a dry and desert climate, due to its enclosure by the Karkas mountain range, abundant water, and geographical location, it has a favorable and pleasant climate that has always been of interest to kings and princes as a hunting ground and summer residence (Mokhtari Taleghani & Khosravi Javid, 2016).

The neighborhoods of this city are scattered, and the structure of the city is disjointed (Mohammadi et al., 2021). According to historical sources and archaeological evidence, the history of settlement in the city of Natanz dates back to the Sassanid period (Mohammadi et al., 2022). The historical neighborhoods of Natanz include Qasbeh, Baghestan, Afushte, Rise, Vishte, Kunduz, Sareshk, Mazraa Khatir, Mazidabad, Vashveshad, and Rahn, the initial core and main focus of its development being the Qasbeh neighborhood, and the process of forming the current fabric of the city dates back to the Qajar period (Mokhtari Taleghani & Khosravi Javid, 2016). The structure of the neighborhoods is such that a prominent building is located in the center of the neighborhood, residential houses are located in the next layer, and at the end, the neighborhood is surrounded by gardens.

Findings

• Reading the green landscape of Natanz

Reading the green landscape of Natanz shows that several types of green typologies can be observed in Natanz. The most important typology is the city garden, which has formed the main structure of the city. The second type is the green oases located in key points of the city. These two types of typologies have a historical background and are distinct from contemporary green spaces. Other types of green typologies are related to the contemporary period and include green spaces built by the municipality, including urban parks and public green spaces. Each of these typologies has its own characteristics, and each plays a distinct role in the structure of the city and the lives of citizens. Table 1 introduces the green typologies evaluated in this study, and Fig. 1 shows the distribution of these typologies in the city of Natanz.

• Garden city

The historical neighborhoods of Natanz have a special structure that consists of the neighborhood center, residential fabric, and gardens in the outer layer. Gardens completely surround the neighborhoods and occupy a large percentage of the city's area. In general, the green network of gardens is subordinate to the Qanat route, and water plays a fundamental role as one of the main factors in the type of garden development. Another factor is the geographical location and climate of Natanz suitable for gardening and growing fruits. The trees planted on the edges of the gardens are non-fruit trees such as plane trees, but in the depths of the garden, mainly fruit trees have been planted, which shows the importance of both types of trees. The type of planting of fruit trees is also such that a garden is not planted with one type of tree in its entirety, but is a combination of several types of fruit trees. Plane trees, which require abundant water, are located next to the water path (Fig. 2).

Table 1. Introduction of Natanz green typologies based on definitions. Source: Authors.

Green typology	Scientific definition	Scale in the city	Historical stability in the context
Urban Park	A park or urban Pardis is a space for humans to connect with nature, spend leisure time, and provide a context for social interactions among citizens (Pasban Hazrat, 2010).	Macroscale	Emergence from the era of modern
Public green space	Green spaces of passageways, neighborhood centers, squares, streets, and spaces that are associated with the public activities of citizens (Khorramrouei et al., 2025).	Mesoscale	Emergence from the era of tradition and a changing paradigm in the modern era
Garden City	The result of the interaction of three factors: water, plants, and architectural bodies, is the formation of the city structure and the creation of a green belt around the cities (Sheybani & Esmaelokht, 2016).	Macroscale	Emergence from the era of tradition
Green oasis	Developing green landscapes in the form of focal points compatible with the climate and capacities of the place (Abdi et al., 2024)	Microscale	Emergence from the era of tradition



Fig. 1. Distribution of green typologies in the city of Natanz. Source: Authors based on Google Earth.



Fig 2. Planting plane trees next to the water path on the edge of the garden, Natanz. Photo: Babak Abdi, 2025.

• **Green oasis**

Green oases are another green typology that has a historical background. This typology includes iconic trees that have a special value in the minds of residents, organized as an oasis. The location of green oases is in focal points and landmarks of the city, such as the center of the neighborhood and the bazaar. The plane tree is one of the trees that is located singly or in multiple groups (Haft-Chenar) in the center of the green oasis. The way these individually planted trees are arranged in the center of attention is such that an organic order is created with an emphasis on selected elements, so that the tree takes on a monumental form and itself is considered a landmark in the center of the neighborhood (Fig. 3). The adaptation of green oases to hot and dry climates and limited water levels is another of its characteristics.

• **Urban parks**

This kind of green typology has been created in the contemporary period as a large green space in isolated places and separated from the urban context. The type of plants in parks is mainly non-native and common

plants that are planted in other urban parks. The type of organization and design of the spaces is also not different from other parks and often includes geometric forms, and the planting method is also in a regular linear and row form. Grass and ornamental flowers are also planted in masses in different parts of the parks (Fig. 4). The use of water in urban parks is in the form of water features and fountains that imitate European models and do not resemble the type of water use in the traditional Iranian landscape. Therefore, the status of water has also been reduced in this type of typology.

• **Public green space**

The type of structure and organization of public green spaces is similar to urban parks, with the difference that they are often smaller in area than parks and are located in linear or patchy patterns in different parts of the city. Linear green spaces adjacent to streets and squares are of this type of green typology. The planting plan of these green spaces is similar to urban parks, using ornamental and non-native plants in linear and row patterns. The area of lawn and flower planting is smaller than in parks,



Fig. 3. The plane tree is a chosen element in the center of green oases at urban landmarks. A) Center of Vashvashad neighborhood, B) Jama Mosque, Natanz. Photo: Babak Abdi, 2025.



Fig 4. Planting grass and non-native plants in urban parks in a row. A) 9 Dey Park, B) Mellat Park, Natanz. Source: Google Maps.

and trees mostly form the structure of these spaces (Fig. 5).

The Role of Green Landscape in the Lives of Residents

Each of the types of green typologies read by the authors plays a different role and function in the lives of residents. Evaluating the role and function of each of these green typologies separately and comparing them with each other reveals the place-making components of the native green landscape of Natanz. The physical characteristics and mental position that the elements of the green landscape have in the minds of residents, as well as the functions that the green landscape has in their daily lives, determine the extent and quality of the role of each of the green typologies. If the organization and location of the green landscape is carried out according to the spatial capacities and the residents' perception of the place, it will have a successful function in meeting the needs of the residents, and their collective mentality and memory will be recorded. Evaluating the degree of compatibility of each of the green typologies with the place in determining the type of their role in the daily lives of people is essential in the development process.

• The role of the garden city

Garden cities have a multi-functional role in the lives of residents, so that in the past, many of them were employed in gardening, and in a way, the products from the gardens provided their economic and livelihood needs. In addition, the continuous and integrated placement of gardens around neighborhoods has created a favorable microclimate for the lives of residents and has provided them with climatic comfort. In terms of recreation, spending time with family in gardens provides residents with recreational and leisure needs. Also, the beauty of the natural elements of plants and water in the garden has created a desirable landscape, and the garden also has an aesthetic function. The connection of residents' daily lives with the garden and natural elements

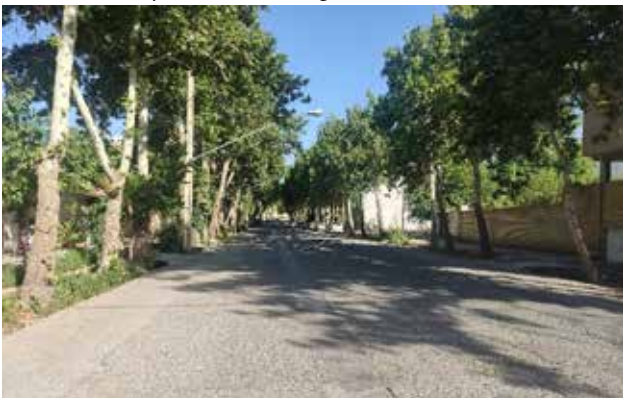


Fig. 5. Planting trees in rows along the street, a type of contemporary public green space, Natanz. Photo: Babak Abdi 2025.

has created their mental connection with the garden and created a sense of belonging to it. Gardens in the city of Natanz determine the structure of the city and the type of expansion of the city, so that the city has developed in a way that the conditions for planting trees and creating gardens are favorable. As a result of these multiple functions of gardens and their significant role in people's lives, gardens have taken on the role of landscapes and have become permanent in the minds of residents.

• The role of green oases

Focal points of the city, such as neighborhood centers, are the setting for important social, ritual, and cultural events. The proximity of selected elements of the green landscape to the most important events in people's lives has led to the sanctity and respect of these elements in the minds of residents. Holding social gatherings, national and ancient celebrations, religious rituals, and mourning ceremonies next to a single tree in the center of the neighborhood brings this sacred status. Therefore, trees planted in green oases are no longer considered merely decorative natural elements, but as landscape elements, they establish an inextricable link with the collective memory and mindset of residents. Daily activities such as sitting and resting under the shade of these trees, meeting with neighbors, and conversing with them next to these green landscape elements consolidate the position and dignity of these trees in the beliefs of residents.

• The role of urban parks

Urban parks are created in places far from the daily lives of residents and as areas for recreational activities. The pattern of these parks is an imitation of Western patterns, and the elements used in them are purely decorative. The planted plants have no connection with the collective mentality and memories of the residents and are often non-native. The separation of these spaces from the daily lives of people and various cultural, social, and ritual activities has reduced this type of green typology to a decorative and recreational element. Therefore, in the mentality of residents, they do not have a sacred status and are considered merely a secondary element; hence, they do not have attachment to it and are not considered an important part of their lives. In case of damage, such spaces are less noticed by residents, and they do not take extensive measures to preserve these spaces. In contemporary development plans and programs, the number and area of parks increase every year to improve green space per capita, but this does not affect their role in people's lives and improving the quality of these spaces.

• The role of public green spaces

The location of these linear green spaces in the vicinity

of pedestrian crossings and traffic junctions has reduced their role to a decorative element next to the passageway, like an advertising board, which has no importance in the daily lives of residents. Planting trees in rows and lines in large numbers has reduced the importance and dignity of trees. The location of contemporary public green spaces is such that no social, cultural, or economic activities take place in these spaces, and as a result, they do not perform any function other than filling the space adjacent to the street. Given the single-function nature of these spaces, the status of this typology in the minds of residents is far lower than that of urban parks. Urban public green spaces, which should have the most connection with the collective minds and memories of residents, have become spaces of little importance due to improper organization and location. In addition, these spaces are weak in terms of integration and connection, both physically and semantically, and are completely structurally disjointed and lack meaningful relationships with each other in the urban structure.

Conclusion

The development of cities without considering the capacities of the place is doomed to failure. Place-based development, meaning development based on the residents' perception of the place, is the most appropriate way of planning for efficient development at the city level. The garden city is a special type of city organization that has its own characteristics and spatial capacities. The development of the green landscape of Natanz should also be carried out in line with the development of the city, considering the residents' perception of the place. Reading the landscapes of the various green typologies

available in Natanz shows that the traditional green landscape of Natanz has been formed in accordance with the place and in proportion to the spatial capacities, while the contemporary green space has been formed without considering these capacities and merely by imitating European models. The traditional green landscape of Natanz responds to the various needs of residents in various cultural, social, economic, environmental, and identity aspects by creating order and emphasizing selected elements in accordance with the capacities of the place, while the contemporary green space has been reduced to a single-function recreational space with decorative elements and has remained ineffective despite increasing efforts to develop it. Table 2 shows the set of characteristics of green typologies in Natanz. In the garden city and green oasis green typologies, the components of the green landscape have a deep connection with the mentality of the residents due to the continuous presence of green elements in people's daily lives and various social, economic, cultural, ritual and environmental activities, and the organization and location of these types of typologies have also been consistent with the place. While in contemporary green typologies, i.e., parks and public green spaces, natural elements are merely decorative and the function of the space is reduced to recreation, its location has been isolated and separate from urban life; as a result, a sense of belonging to these spaces has not been formed in the minds of residents. Paying attention to these place-making components of the green landscape and its associated spatial capacities in the development process will greatly contribute to the greater efficiency of development programs in the future.

Table 2. A comparison of the characteristics of Natanz green typologies. Source: Authors.

Green typology	Green landscape components		Green landscape strategies	
	Tree	Water	Organization	Locating
Garden city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planting fruit trees deep in the garden - Planting non-fruit trees on the edge of the garden - Sacred dignity - Multi-functionality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Determines the type and extent of garden development - Sacred dignity - Multi-functional 	Continuous and integrated	Area around the neighborhood
Green oasis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Selected Native Trees - Specimen - Sacred Dignity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vital factor in creating an oasis - Creating in the form of a pond - Sacred dignity - Multifunctional 	Oasis and focused	Neighborhood center and urban focal points
Urban park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Non-native trees - Linear, row, and mass planting - Recreational function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creation in the form of a water feature and fountain - Dignity and decorative function 	Patch	Isolated places far from social life
Public green space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Non-native trees - Linear and row planting - Ornamental dignity and function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Often absent 	Loose line and spot	The edges of traffic routes and intersections

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