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Fatemeh Farnaz Arefian ·  
Seyed Hossein Iradj Moeini  
Editors

# Urban Heritage Along the Silk Roads

A Contemporary Reading of Urban  
Transformation of Historic Cities  
in the Middle East and Beyond

 Springer

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# Foreword

The story of this book is somehow linked with the story of *Silk Cities*: another milestone in its journey. The idea of having an independent platform to maintain and foster contextual dialogues on urban matters emerged during our first conference *Urban Change in Iran*. The idea was later developed to become *Silk Cities* ([www.silkcities.org](http://www.silkcities.org)). As the name implies, the notion of Urban Silk Roads highlights connectivity and exchange of knowledge, concerns and idea, not only by urban managers but the professional and academics and ultimately people living in those territories.

As an independent and bottom-up initiative, *Silk Cities* adapted an exploratory approach on ideas and its activities; simultaneously, it maintained to have yearly smaller scale activities, for example, collaborating with Springer, *Urban Series* for the publication of the book *Urban Change in Iran*, based on selected and updated papers of that conference; an international one-day knowledge exchange workshop and participating in exhibitions and running panel discussions in other international conferences. However, during this time as the founder of *Silk Cities*, I was frequently asked the same question: When is the next conference? It appeared that those whom *Silk Cities* was engaged with wanted another magnetic get-together... well! *When there is a first step, there should be a second one too...* The answer was the second conference, *Silk Cities 2017*, based on which this book builds on. The second conference was again generously hosted by DPU at UCL. Researchers and practitioners alike explored how to reconnect population to their urban cultural heritage in the Middle East and Central Asia (<http://silk-cities.org/conference2017>). The combination of thematic sessions comprising papers accepted by the scientific committee, panel discussions and special sessions by guest speakers acted as a cross-generational tool and created a bridge between the younger and more experienced generations, as well as bringing together academia and practice.

The conference examined dynamics of sociocultural factors that affect lives and discussed architecture, urban spaces, people and the reality of challenge on how to work with the multi-scalar levels of identity. Examinations of comparing the change in the forms of urbanisation focused on the interaction between culture and policy, showing that reconnecting population with urban heritage depends on great minds

that bring together a variety of moralities with different social and cultural norms. Critical questions were also raised on who does what to whom, and why? Heritage is about selectivity, power and politics as to asserting local, national and international interests; tensions between authenticity and a depiction of an 'accurate' past; layers of history are removed, while others are highlighted. There exist diverse approaches to rethink heritage and restoration through acknowledging and integrating cultural identity, questioning the relationship between this history and the region's physical and social trajectory, the notion of modern and contemporary heritage, the dynamics between urban heritage and cultural identity, the linkages between old and new urban fabrics and monuments, and regional political factors leading to the core questions of what heritage means, who it is defined by, who that definition benefits and how that definition is represented in urban development practice. The geographic coverage included Afghanistan, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Mongolia, Pakistan, Palestine, Serbia, Syria, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The few selected papers here do not fully reflect the geographic diversity and multidisciplinary nature of discussions, provided through traditional presentations and invited guest speakers.

For the structuring reasons it was important to keep the balance in the geographic diversity by limiting the number of papers on each country, and to select recommended papers regardless of the country of their case studies on the other hand. However, there was an imbalance in the number of submitted/accepted papers across the region that influenced the way this book has been structured, with Iranian-related papers outnumbering others. This was predictable as *Silk Cities* is originated from a conference on contemporary Iranian cities, whereas the second conference had a regional focus in order to foster dialogues on neighbouring countries which share many common issues. We balanced the geographic coverage of the conference, though, inviting guest speakers and panel discussions, found in the post-conference report at <http://silk-cities.org/post-conference-report>. For the book, though, the answer was to have a 'Zoom in' part, which could meaningfully narrow down all discussions in other parts to a single country and provide an in-depth case study.

This book provides evidence-based multi-perspective examinations of cities in historic landscapes. Part I emphasises the crucial role of open public spaces on linking urban heritage and cultural identity, existing potentials and challenges, as well as emerging ideas. For example, those open spaces around heritage locations in addressing a social challenge for connecting migrant populations to their city and the emerging holistic approaches to fieldwork, with a focus on connecting residents to their own heritage. Part II focuses on governing urban heritage that traditionally relies on local governance, often with established quantitative measures and processes. New methodologies are nevertheless finding their ways to enter the rigid planning systems, such as engaging with locals for dealing with declining neighbourhoods. Similarly, potentials are emerging for addressing ongoing tensions between competing forces for new developments in the buffer zones of historical monuments with central locations in cities. Yet there are challenges in the reality of practice that ideally can be examined and dealt with preferably before the

implementation. There is a need for institutional arrangements and change if required, as well as leadership and impartial understanding of the consequences of policy formulations in practice. Part III discusses post-war urban reconstruction. The timely discussions here build a solid ground for multidimensional examination of addressing urban heritage and identity with reconstruction of destructed historic cities, with a specific focus on housing reconstruction and the reconstruction of the city beyond the restoration of its renowned monuments, such as citadels. Part IV is the aforementioned 'Zoom In' on urban heritage in Iran and can be read as a standalone manuscript. It offers new ideas on contemporarisation of traditional housing stock, showing that at least some typologies of traditional houses can be updated and meets our current lifestyle. It also deals with the notion of modern heritage for new developments from one side and the adaptation of new facilitative strategies and digital technologies for smart cities for everyday urban governance in historic cities from the other side. Examinations go beyond buildings and neighbourhoods and include urban qanats which might still have running water. The book will be a resourceful reading for academics and practitioners alike working on the subject matter.

... *And what's next?* On the final day of the *Silk Cities* 2017, a highly engaging and buzzing workshop 'Urban Café' facilitated individual reflections on the future directions for *Silk Cities*. It appeared that coming together more regularly is a magnetic hub for all. Suggestions were summarised running regular conferences, workshops and publications... *so the journey continues...* At the time of this publication, *Silk Cities* 2019 was underway: *Silk Cities International Conference 2019* focusing on *Reconstruction, Recovery and Resilience of Historic Cities and Societies*, being co-organised by *Silk Cities*, University of L'Aquila and UCL, and held in L'Aquila, Italy (<http://silk-cities.org/2019-conference-overview>). During and after the related thematic session at the second conference, the need for further discussions and more in-depth attention to this urgent matter was highlighted: something the third conference intended to address.

As you would expect, *Silk Cities* is still in the making yet it taps on a collective will of both younger and experienced generations of academics and practitioners who share concerns and experiences in dealing with real-life urban matters of cities in question those who see connectivity and knowledge sharing as a strategic way forward, to provide a means for improving the quality of the *Urban Silk Roads*.

Hope you enjoy the book.

Singapore

Dr. Fatemeh Farnaz Arefian

# Acknowledgements

The preparation of this book greatly owes to all individuals and organisations supported and contributed to the second Silk Cities international conference. Entitled *Reconnect Population to Urban Heritage in the Middle East & Central Asia*, it was held at UCL 11–13 July 2017. Organised by *Silk Cities* ([www.silk-cities.org](http://www.silk-cities.org)) and the Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU, UCL, [www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development)). The conference also received academic support from the UCL Institute of Advance Studies, Oxford Brookes University and the Urban Design Group UK.

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**Fatemeh Farnaz Arefian** has academic and practical background in architecture and urban design, and an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in development planning from the Development Planning Unit, DPU at UCL. She is the founder of Silk Cities initiative for knowledge exchange and research on contextual contemporary challenges of cities in the Middle East and Central Asia. Farnaz is affiliated with the University of Newcastle (UON), Australia, and an honorary research associate at DPU, UCL, UK. She combines academic research and education with extensive practical experience and has a background in leading her own private sector consultancy for delivering large-scale urban design/planning and architectural projects in the Middle East and Europe, including post-disaster urban reconstruction. She is invited and visiting lecturer at universities and workshops. Farnaz has published academic and professional books and papers. Publication examples include *Organising Post Disaster Reconstruction Processes* (Springer 2018) and *Urban Change in Iran* (Springer 2016).

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