

## Cultural Landscape and Rural Development

**Mohsen Sartipipour, Ph.D**

Associate professor

Department of Architecture

School of Architecture & Urbanism

Member of Research Center for Rural Architecture

Shahid Beheshti University

G.C., I.R. IRAN

### Abstract

*Villages are the first permanent human settlements in human life history. In territories with ancient civilizations, there are many evidences indicating the relationship between human and physical environment, while a considerable portion of them are found in rural areas. From a holistic viewpoint towards cultural heritage, such monuments do belong not only to some certain regions solely, but to all human communities. Conservation and restoration of these monuments both can allow the dialogue of civilizations and can be an important factor for development of countries, especially developing nations. Restoration of this heritage and determining its role can be used as an approach to accelerate rural development. History of Iran also indicates thousands of years of civilization. Identification, conservation and restoration of rural cultural landscape, while helping to protect the national-historical capitals of countries can provide new physical environment with sustainability principles inherited from past by discovery of secrets and symbols behind it. This is an effective factor in prosperity and growth of rural areas.*

**Keywords:** Cultural landscape, Cultural heritage, Conservation, Restoration, Rural development.

### 1. Introduction

Despite the growth and spread of urbanization and the increase in the number of cities and urban population throughout the world, still a very large number of human settlements are located in rural areas worldwide. According to 2005 statistics, about 51% of the world population and 61% of the population in Asian and African countries live in rural areas (<http://esa.un.org/unpp>), and a major portion of the population in countries such as China, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh is comprised of rural population. The number of the rural settlements in these countries is much more than the number of urban settlements and their territories are much broader than urban territories, and there are numerous valuable architectural buildings and monuments in such villages which historically belong to the past.

	1950		2005		2030	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Africa	33,319	190,749	360,070	545,866	783,205	680,288
Asia	231,787	1,164,467	1,557,308	2,348,107	2,656,554	2,215,918
Europe	280,325	267,080	533,870	194,519	555,474	142,666
Latin America	70,034	97,287	435,561	125,785	611,304	111,073
North America	109,648	61,967	267,119	63,489	347,605	52,474
Pacific	7,762	5,045	24,241	8,814	31,868	10,675
World	732,974	1,786,496	3,177,465	3,287,293	4,986,617	3,212,487

**Table 1: urban and rural populations in the world's continents in 1000**

(Source: <http://esa.un.org/unpp>)

Examples of civilization and human settlements across the plains of Iranian plateau are evidenced by *Shahr-e Sookhteh* (the Burnt City) in Sistān (the third and the fourth millennium B.C.), Tappeh-Hesār-e Dāmqañ (fifth millennium B.C.), Sialk-e Kāshān, Jiroft and surrounding areas of Marvdasht, Shoosh and Haft-Tappeh, and remnants of heritage in these places indicate signs of rural life in them.

Some areas such as Ganj-Darreh and Sarāb-e Asiāb in Kermānshāh, Ali-Kash in Dehlorān, Gorān in Halilān and Choqābanout in Khuzestān are considered among the oldest rural areas in Iran. There are 63,883 villages in Iran (Statistical Center of Iran, 2006), and a considerable number of them have valuable historical background and monuments such as mosques, tombs, Hosseiniyeh, public baths, water reservoirs, old ice-houses<sup>1</sup>, as well as houses or other buildings of historical and cultural values. Such monuments are part of the historical identity of the community, and their role in social and cultural development plans in rural areas can not be ignored. In some cases, this heritage is in so much harmony with the environment that it constitutes a beautiful combination of the natural environment and architecture. From this perspective, rural cultural landscape is a part of national heritage and identity of the human community which can not be ignored. There are thousands of villages with such features in many countries, and the lack of knowledge regarding their cultural heritage makes documentation, introduction and classification of such monuments inevitable.

At present, many rural planners and villagers in these countries are not aware of the existence of such monuments and their attached significance. Even if some of them are identified, there are no targeted and specific programs or policies for protection and restoration of them or for predefining of their roles in national and rural development. Such unawareness and negligence have led to the lack of law enactment for protection of the rural architectural heritage and consequently inattention to their conservation and restoration. This paper aims to clarify the role and significance of such heritage in continuing the physical texture identity of rural settlements, and tries to provide appropriate solutions for identifying, conserving and restoring them, and attempts to call attention for using them as stimuli for rural development. The paper is consisted of three main sections. The first part is dedicated to the definition of the problem, its significance and the issue of conservation and restoration of this heritage. The second section deals with barriers and practical solutions for conservation and restoration of this heritage. The final section of the paper is devoted to the conclusion and providing a practical framework for identifying, protecting and restoring this heritage, and its application in rural development and growth.

## **2. Problem**

The term "cultural landscape" is the result of gradual expansion of the concept of "cultural heritage" in the second half of the twentieth century. UN summits in 1972 regarding human environment, and sustainable development issues and programs in 1971 concerning biosphere and human were followed by some developments and caused that some twenty years later World Heritage Committee (1992) would admit the concept of *Cultural Landscape*. (Jokilehto, 2007) Cultural landscape is a notion that deals with human's interaction with nature in his past and today's life and the historical interaction with local people. Hence, it can fully reflect communities' cultural heritage and include explicit and implicit values of their inhabitants. These monuments are some preliminary documentations of the general history of human life that exhibit the past just as it was and provide the possibility of being connected with the past through locations and their relevant overwhelming sense.

So, by means of cultural landscape, we can comprehend the identity of our past and make a richer future on the basis of the fact that who we are and where we come from, and try to conserve this identity for the future. Such definition clarifies that cultural landscape conservation in a specific area or region not only means the protection of cultural heritage values of that area or region but also signifies retaining the values of the country and even the whole world. Review of cultural heritage of rural architecture reveals its historical values and necessitates its conservation and restoration in order to maintain the long-term interests of societies and civilizations. Despite their high value and importance, these monuments have been treated by people with an almost unlimited freedom in terms of intervening in them and even destroying them completely, and basically, no much sensitivity and care for conserving cultural heritage of countries can be observed in rural areas. (Sartipour, 2009b) Negligence of and being inattentive to such a significant issue makes it impossible to connect with a part of countries' culture and civilization and risks the continuation and connection of future generations with their past history and culture.

---

<sup>1</sup> In some hot and dry areas of Iran where the temperature difference between night and day is high, and where the temperature during the year falls below zero degrees Celsius, some buildings were built to supply ice for hot days which were called *yakhchāl* (ice-houses). These buildings were usually located on the fringe of villages and towns and had neighboring pools with a large surface area but a depth of a few centimeters where drinking water was directed to them in the cold season. After freezing and crystallization of water, it would be broken up into pieces and would be stored in those ice-houses. Ice pieces accumulated in such ice-houses could be kept for up to several months to be used by people during the summer when the weather was very hot. Such ice-houses were called *yakhchāl*, where "yakh" means ice and "chāl" means that pit where ice pieces were kept.

In other words, disconnection with the past makes the rural indigenous art and knowledge largely forgotten and leads to loss of sense of identity, nationality, and ultimately self-confidence of the society, and consequently, determining the future path becomes more difficult. Therefore, the necessity of understanding values of rural architectural heritage and conserving them becomes comprehensible.

World heritage and its variants as "development assets" can be effective in mobilizing communities, alleviating poverty, improving development efficiency, economic growth and enhancing the quality of life. (Chavez, 2002) Yet, from another perspective toward rural development, it is necessary that required facilities and resources for development are searched and identified which will help to reduce the distance between urban and rural areas. From this point of view, those villages with little income and capital resources which are qualified in terms of such heritage are considered to be important factors for mobility and transformation. Entering into such a process requires answering the following questions:

- How cultural landscapes and rural architectural heritage can be identified and classified given their variety and diversity?
- How can the relationship between rural development and architectural heritage be used for determining their role in the trend of rural development?

### ***3. Conservation of Rural Architectural Heritage***

While there are many monuments of rural cultural heritage in many countries including Iran, there is no comprehensive plan for conservation and restoration of them and they can play no role in rural development. (Sartipipour, 2009a) Conservation of such monuments, which are valuable heritage assets, is often overlooked or conducted on few cases using limited funds allocated by state governments. Although in some countries, governments have tried to take measures for conservation and restoration of them using limited funds, but governments can not afford the broad set of activities that should be done in this field. Therefore, besides state direction, supervision and assistance, adopting a people-centered approach which attracts public contributions, investments and facilities is inevitable. Realization of such situation can be pursued through considering the following issues:

**3.1** To clarify the point that such heritage is among spiritual and material assets of the community, the first necessary step is to understand its impact on social and cultural development and its role in regional development. This task can be carried out by establishment of non-government and specialized organizations in charge of identifying, introducing, and clarifying such heritage. For this purpose, the first thing is identification of such buildings and the next one is introduction of their cultural, technical, artistic and functional features. (Emadi et al, 1999) To be able to work more accurately, this work should be conducted in such a way that the monuments would be classified on the basis of their global, regional, national and local significance. Such evaluation and classification is very important for conservation and maintenance of monuments with global, regional, and national values, because by determining conservation or restoration priorities, effective plans can be developed and implemented. Implementation of this stage requires investments for training individuals who would acquire sufficient knowledge and skills for understanding and leading these issues. They will be able to determine the level of importance, i.e. global, regional, national or local, and take the appropriate measures by means of proper understanding and evaluation. Thus establishment of well-built, specialized, educational, promotional and regulatory organizations (such as Rural Cultural Heritage Institution) becomes important. (Sartipipour, 2009a)

**3.2** Misunderstanding and misconception about ancient heritage has caused that in some cases such heritage would be considered as a sign of retardation and antiquity-orientation which has paved the way for its collapse or destruction. It can be seen that the rural architectural heritage is damaged or destroyed in the name of upgrade and development due to public ignorance and negligence of some engineers and executives. However, objection voice of some certain people or cultural experts will not solely solve the problem. In addition to informing and educating the public, alarming all the agents involved in rural development is among the required tasks. The content of such trainings and education can be general and with the aim of ensuring realization and recognition of valuable monuments so that the real status of cultural heritage would be established in sectoral and spatial plans (Sartipipour, 2009a). It should be noted that the purpose of this type of training is not to educate experts in the field of identification and conservation of cultural heritage. Being ensured of redefinition of such monuments' role in the process of rural development and training in this field are among the important steps that can help us in decision-making process for conservation and restoration.

In the case of clarification of such monuments' significance and role in rural areas' development, it is necessary that specific plans and tasks would be included in physical development programs for conservation of this heritage, and training will also play an important role in this process. (UNCHS, 1996)

**3.3** Multi-dimensionality of development has caused that the governments not to be able to conduct it alone. Considering the target and purpose of development process can be important for justification and clarification of the role of public participation. Involvement and participation of people are among important elements for realization and the success of such programs. Prospect and consideration of the publics' main role in this process seems to be essential. (Hojjat, 2002, pp. 158&159) People will have the opportunity to actively participate, as individuals or volunteer groups and associations, in all aspects of the conservation and restoration of cultural heritage. It should be noticed that the governments' success in protecting or restoring some monuments should not be regarded as its capability in protection of all historical heritage of an area or the whole country. For example, if the number of such monuments would be large and they would be located in remote areas of a country, the government's success in this issue will be less probable. Adopting relatively unworkable legislation and introducing tough protection regulations through a top-bottom approach, the governments sometimes try to solve the problem of heritage protection without considering the role of people.

Although laws can partly contribute to the conservation of rural heritage, achieving success in this field is not possible through mere legislation. Due to multiple productive results of public participation in cultural heritage conservation, international organizations and institutions strongly advise public participation in various projects of protection and conservation of the past heritage. (Jokilehto, 1986) The process of efficient protection of cultural landscapes requires that the people be brought together to maintain the identity of their community and heritage and to achieve a participatory approach at local level but within global framework. Therefore, local communities must be involved in all aspects, i.e. identification, design and management of regions because people are the most important guardians of this heritage (World Heritage paper 7, 2002). Being aware of this issue has the most profound impact on achieving efficient use of capitals in development process. This involves adoption of a holistic approach by cultural heritage experts, architects and implementers of development as well as their commitment and practical initiatives.

#### **4. From thought to Action**

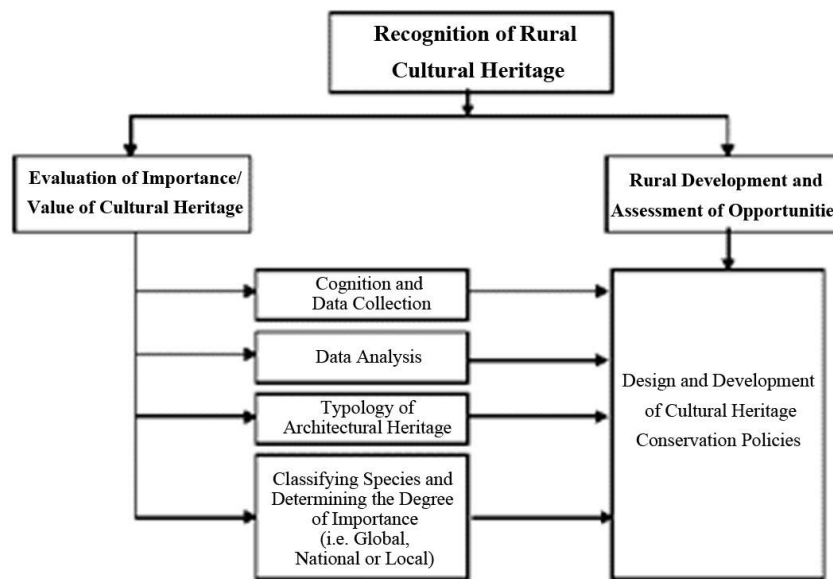
Conservation and restoration of rural cultural heritage is an issue which can not be simply realized relying on the governments' will and financial resources. In fact, it requires adopting an appropriate approach and a comprehensive plan. At present, since most developing countries are not fully aware of the number, the type and location of such monuments, many of them are unrecognized or unknown. Efforts for identifying and classifying such buildings and monuments, and recognizing their memorial or symbolic values as well as reusing the applied signs and elements can lead to maintenance and continuation of cultural and artistic identity of villages. For this purpose, trying to identify this heritage through documentation and then classifying them in terms of function type, species and degree of significance, i.e. global, regional or local, is quite crucial. After identifying them and setting priorities, the following actions should be conducted: (1) conservation, (2) preservation, (3) rehabilitation, (4) restoration, and finally (5) restoration with modern functions. More practical solutions for conservation of architectural monuments are repair, restoration and change of land use according to conservation principles of concerned buildings and current needs of rural areas. (Sartipour, 2009a)

An important issue that has been neglected in this process is conservation of such heritage in development and construction plans and measures that often lead to ignoring these monuments. Change in attitude and paying attention to the capacities provided through restoration of these monuments can result in their conservation, and also creates another stimulus for rural development. From this perspective, the possibility of affecting the results of development by restoration of such monuments should be taken into consideration.

The present atmosphere of rural development in many countries is directed toward poverty alleviation through creation of welfare, educational and health services, and in such process, cultural heritage and wealth and its quality is not taken into account. Accordingly, rural development strategies and types of actions should be designed in such a way that they can not only upgrade the quality of life, but also help realization of cultural heritage conservation.

**5. Conclusion**

If the typology process of cultural landscape and heritage, environments and historic sites in rural areas can be carried out based on their global, regional, national and local significance, then a process model on the basis of their transnational, national and local importance can be achieved. Such a model can lead to optimized directing of facilities and funds for these monuments and can determine which monument, with what function, in which region and with what predicted role should be conserved and resorted. For example, cultural landscapes of global significance are likely require financial resources more than what come from national and local budgets, and by clarification of their global significance, it becomes possible to benefit from financial, technical and professional supports of international organizations such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), and International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). Such monuments can play a more important role in development process. By recognition of the role of the monuments at global or regional scale, the economic justification for related investment will also become feasible and a set of associated services can be established in rural areas which, in turn, will help to create jobs and lead to prosperity of rural areas. (Figure 1)



**Figure 1: The process of identification of rural cultural heritage monuments and development of the relevant conservation and restoration policies.**

Such monuments are incentives for investing in welfare and accommodation services and even can cause the development and prosperity of local rural industries, which are usually remarkable and attractive to the eyes of tourists. It should be observed that governmental budgets in many developing and the Third World countries are usually devoted to development and improvement infrastructure, education, nutrition, housing etc., and it is impossible for them to allocate considerable funds for cultural heritage. In addition, the more local would be such heritage, the more difficult would be the justification for using state funds. Under such circumstances, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who have greater freedom in using public facilities and have easier access to them are suitable alternatives for governments in this field. Paying attention to people, using their power and activating private sector are important approaches that can not only conserve such monuments but also will eventually lead to further rural development activities.

## **References**

- Chavez, R., et al. (2002). *Cultural Heritage and Slum Upgrading*. MIT: World Bank.
- Emadi, M. H., & Abbassi, E. (1999) *The Old Wisdom in the New Age: Application of Indigenous Knowledge in Sustainable Development*. A Publication of Rural Research Centre, Ministry of Jihad-e Sazandegi, Islamic Republic of Iran.
- Hojjat, M. (2002). *Cultural heritage in Iran (Policies for an Islamic state)*. Tehran: Cultural Heritage Organization (Introduction and Education Deputy).
- Jokilehto, J. (1986). *A History of Architectural Conservation, the Contribution of English, French, German and conservation of Cultural Property*. D. Phil. Dissertation, University of York.
- Jokilehto, J. (2006). *Management of cultural landscapes: a workshop of upgrading management and planning of cultural landscapes of world heritage*. 2006/06/01.
- Parton, N. (1996) *Social theory, Social change and Social work*. London.
- Sartipipour, M. (2009a). *Pathology of rural architecture: Toward a favorable settlement*. Islamic Revolution Housing Foundation and Shahid Beheshti University. Tehran: Shahidi Publications.
- Sartipipour, M. (2009b). Rural Architecture Heritage Preservation and Revival: Necessity and Revival Solutions. *Journal of housing and rural environment*. 127.
- Statistical Center of Iran (2006). *General Population and Housing Census of 2006*, Tehran.
- UNCHS (1996). *The Habitat Agenda: goals and principles commitments and global plan of action*. Turkey: Istanbul.
- UNCHS (1997). *Manual for Evaluation Training Impact on Human Settlements*. Nairobi: UNCHS (HABITAT).
- UNESCO (2002). *Cultural Landscape: The Challenges of Conservation, World Heritage Papers 7*. Ferrara: World heritage Center.