

Recognizing the Elements of the Agricultural Landscape in Kamu va Chogan city, Iran *

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Received; 10/07/2020

revise; 06/08/2020

accepted; 17/08/2020

available online; 01/10/2020

Abstract

The city of Kamu va Chogan is one of the major historical settlements in the central region of the Iranian Plateau preserving the rural characteristics of its earlier days. One of the most prominent cultural features of the city is its agriculture as the majority of the population depends on it for their economic needs. The identificatory function of the agricultural economy which impacts different layers of the inhabitants' social and individual lives, has created a unique picture of cultural relationships that can be examined as agricultural landscape. Understanding the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan is significant with regards to how it can help us make better-informed and accurately-envisioned decisions to preserve and sustainably develop this landscape in the future. Moreover, to understand this landscape, it is necessary to discern its identificatory elements or the elements that have emerged through the interactions of its inhabitants with the natural environment. Therefore, this study seeks the quiddity of the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan using the case study model and analysis of content to evaluate available data. To accomplish this, the various elements of the agricultural landscape were explained following an examination of these elements found in the landscape of Kamu va Chogan. Furthermore, they were categorised into the three groups of agricultural lands, agricultural products, and agricultural society. Finally, after an in-depth explanation and examination of these elements, strategies for their preservation and development were presented.

Keywords: *Kamu va Chogan, Rural Landscape, Agricultural Landscape, Fruitful Landscape, Landscape Components.*

* This article is based on a field trip report, entitled "the Tourism of Kamoo Native Landscape", which was held in 2018 under the supervision of Dr. Seyed Amir Mansouri,

and funded by Nazar Research Center (NRC).

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Introduction

The city of Kamu va Chogan, formed as the two historical villages of Kamu and Chogan merged, is situated on the western foot of the Karkas mountains to the north of the arid province of Esfahan. The abundance of water and a balanced climate allows a diverse set of plants to grow on the Karkas ranges making them a suitable site for self-sustained rural communities like Kamu va Chogan. The village, as a habitat, is characterised by unique components distinguishing it from other such phenomena. The most important among such components are comprised of three categories. The first category is concerned with the natural space or environment as defined by location, terrain topography, climate, and vegetation. The second deals with the pattern of settlement and the consequent impacts and range of the various activities of the different groups in the rural community. The third category revolves around concepts related to the unique space or landscape that is a symbolic product of human activities in any given space. Moreover, This space represents how houses are established, how resources are exploited, ownership relations, type and scope of production, and even how each family or group is established and positioned in the whole of the rural structure or community (Raheb, 2008, 111). The above characteristics deal with the physical or structural aspect of villages; however, rural landscapes, as integrations of objective and subjective components, cover a broader range of concepts. The rural landscape can be considered the byproduct of the intellectual evolution of its inhabitants as influenced by cultural factors and physical or objective aspects of the village. Each village has a distinct geographical environment possessing an identity formed through its connection with the lives of its inhabitants. The said identity is manifested in the various components of such a space. The rural landscape, unlike the urban landscape shaped by the consumer economy, is founded on production. The agricultural system is considered an

economic infrastructure of the village which brings forth certain characteristics. The significance of these subsequent characteristics goes beyond economic and cultural considerations. It can furthermore serve as a context for examining the general landscape of the village. The economic aspect of agriculture in rural life is so prominent that it has led to the emergence of distinct forms of subjective relations and cultural subjects which can be discussed independently by scholars of the agricultural landscape; a subfield of the cultural landscape. Since the landscape is understandable through its elements and symbols, the present study seeks to examine such signs and elements in the landscape of Kamu va Chogan. It furthermore aims to recognize and categorize of the various elements found in the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan. Consequently, the landscape and the different components of the agricultural landscape were defined first followed by their descriptions and classifications.

Research Question

What are the components of the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan? What developmental strategies could be formed through a landscape-oriented examination of agricultural lands, products, and communities in Kamu va Chogan?

Hypothesis

Based on the study of agricultural landscape components, it seems that the elements forming the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan can be divided into three categories: The first category, agricultural lands, is concerned with the locational, formal, and spatial characteristics of the agricultural lands of Kamu va Chogan. The second, agricultural products, deals with the functional aspects of agriculture and horticulture in the area and the importance of fruit-bearing plant species such as the abundant grapevine and useful trees such as spruce, willow, etc. The final one, agricultural community,

is concerned with the social and cultural impacts of agriculture on human relationships Kamu va Chogan.

Methodology

Given that the study aims to examine and have a detailed observation of the different dimensions of the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan and to holistically interpret the data, the case study model was adopted. In this study, the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan was examined as a system with specific cultural elements and dynamics to help understand its components and processes. The majority of the qualitative data of the research was field-gathered through observation, and then analyzed in combination with library data.

Elements of Landscape

Landscape, in this case, the landscape of Kamu va Chogan, can be understood through the recognition of its constituent elements or signs. Yet, to understand these constituent elements, the concept of sign or signifier should first be understood. A signifier (sign) signifies a vast area (the signified) of meaning. Signs are a construct of the collective consciousness of societies and a product of history. The repetition of synonymous connotations for a single sign and the gradual addition of new meanings to that single element create a broad range of meanings without clear boundaries. The sign may refer to all these meanings but choosing the desired meaning and understanding and defining it is up to the listener. In other words, the signifier is the indicating element expressing meaning and the signified is its content. In semiotics, signifier and signified are two separate but interrelated identities. The independence of signifier and signified from one another in the system of signs has far-reaching consequences on its control and dynamics. The signified is a semantic connotation associated with a symbol throughout history. The present observer, who is aware of the past collective memory, gains access to its past associations through

re-reading this symbol. The perception of meaning with regards to the connection between the signifier and the signified depends on two factors: historical mindset and reason. If the audience of a sign possesses no memory of the concepts associated with a certain sign, they can never have a chance to understand its meaning. The reason is the single tool through which one can discern the relationship between signs and the memories of the associated concepts. Understanding this relationship is different from emotional and conscious intuition and can only be achieved through reasoning (Mansouri, 2010, 6). The elements of the landscape are signs of signifying objective-subjective concepts. That is why for discussing the landscape elements of Kamu va Chogan, both its structural aspects and the subjective associations of its audience are necessary to examine.

Agricultural Landscape

Agricultural farms are an inseparable part of the landscape of villages and small cities as the survival and development of such human habitations depend on them. The four main functions of habitation, subsistence, security, and an additional social role can be considered universal to all villages. The subsistence or economic function can be examined considering its relationship with habitation as one of the bases of rural sedentism. Iranian villages generally rely on agriculture, as well as animal husbandry, for subsistence as they have provided them with a steady livelihood for many generations (Ghassemi, 2009, 221). The agricultural landscape is a form of a landscape whose symbols and elements have evolved in interaction with the agricultural economy. As discussed in the introduction, the components forming the landscape of a village include both structural elements such as location, settlement pattern, and space (Raheb, 2008, 111) as well as cultural and identificatory concepts. Some scholars have described the landscape as a physical concept. Kizos & Koulouri (2006, 330), for instance, described

it as a visual product of human exploitation of land and its management systems. Marshall (2002) described it as biological mosaics including agricultural land, semi-natural habitat, and human infrastructure (such as roads) (Marshall, 2002, 365). Sameh (2015), however, described the village regarding landscape as: Man chooses his position in the natural environment through settling down, isolating a portion of the environment, relying on which allows him to exchange his thoughts, feelings, and cultural achievements with his fellow human beings. The site of the village also includes a center where the earth and the sky penetrate one another to create a compelling whole. By revealing and creating momentarily present qualities, this center forms a focal point for the manifestation of human presence in nature and presents a structural landscape. For the landscape of a village to emerge at this level, it must proportionally dominate the surrounding landscape. This is the quality that may potentially make the village viable to be a consciously chosen tourist destination (Sameh & Sameh, 2015). Taqvaei (2013) also asserted: The first dimension is the perception through which the image and the general structure of the village emerges. This general image, consisting of the ground, sky, and horizon, can be considered the silhouette (skyline) and the initially-perceived view of the village. A more discernible image and the structure of the landscape of the village is observable next. Then, by arriving at the village, pastures, fields, gardens, the general texture, visual elements, buildings and the composition of major materials are sequentially recognized and some components of the landscape are understood (Taqvaei, 2013, 26). This is the first image of the rural landscape that is presented to the audience like a brief introduction. This general picture is comprised of the objective components of the village, which have formed in interaction with various factors such as subsistence, life, and the interrelatedness between the two (Naseri, 2018). The second dimension of the rural landscape is formed by components originating from the unique identity and

environment of each village. Influenced by factors such as climate, indigenous characteristics, and local properties different in each area, the diversifying differences between such components of rural landscapes represent the overall identity of villages. These identificatory properties of the landscape appear in local architecture, dress, ceremonies, rituals, and other such manifestations of identity. A critical point is that the landscape of the village is an indivisible totality whose subjective aspects and physical manifestations appear simultaneously and uniformly. Consequently, when dealing with issues concerning the maintenance and development of rural landscapes, the main concern is not preserving and expanding the structure of the village in its historical form. Preserving and improving the collective lives of the inhabitants and all their distinct cultural characteristics are also vital in any such development plans. In other words, the landscape of a village is inseparable from the lives of its inhabitants. Therefore, the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan is a totality. This synthetic whole has been formed through the interwoven interactions between the geographical characteristics of the region and its current and bygone generations of inhabitants as observable in its historical evolution. The various elements in the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan are recognizable from the selective perceptual perspective of its inhabitants.

Landscape Elements of Kamu va Chogan

• Agricultural Lands

It seems that by affecting different aspects of human life such as environmental sustainability in the process of production and consumption of crops, collective participation in its management, and a sense of belonging to the natural world, agricultural landscapes help shape cultural landscapes (Sheibani & Sadeghi, 2013, 14). Therefore, although the agricultural landscape is based on practical necessities, its continued existence has produced a cultural environment with a landscape function. Agricultural lands can be

examined on two scales: On the macro scale, the relations between lands, order, and the specific schemes connecting them can be examined. On the micro-scale, the formal and spatial characteristics of agricultural lands are examined. Holistically speaking, however, agricultural subsistence and the daily lives of the villagers are so inseparable that all the functions of the village depend on the existence of agricultural lands, and the activities are undertaken on them. The agricultural landscape, in addition to being a reliable source to fulfill basic needs, can also be considered the origin of the social identity system (Sharghi, Mahdinejad & Molaei, 2016, 118-124). However, the agricultural lands in Kamu va Chogan have surpassed mere functional uses acquiring subjective and identity-making characteristics that play a landscaping role for the settlement. The shape of agricultural lands is affected by slope and terrain as well as irrigation methods; wadis, other natural waterways, or artificial irrigation. Since Kamu va Chogan is located on the heights of the Karkas mountain range, the slope of the terrain varies from one area to another. Given that the irrigation system is formed based on the adjustment to the slope, these agricultural farms generally form as irregular geometric shapes, each uniquely adjusting to the terrain. Moreover, the soil type of the area is a characterizing factor as the fertile soil of these two villages has a red hue due to the iron oxide found in it. The red soil of Kamu va Chogan, in addition to tinting the visual aspect of the agricultural lands, also gives a unique color to the mud buildings rising from the ground. As mentioned before, another factor is the matter of irrigation. Water resources are always the main factor in land formation. As the water supply for these agricultural lands is provided by the Kamu va Chogan River and aqueducts feeding from it, the direction of the natural flow of water on the surface determines their orientation. The Kamu va Chogan River, which flows from northeast to southwest, acts as a backbone for the farms, orchards, and

nurseries stretching to the east and west organizing the landscape with their rectangular forms (Fig. 1). However, following the man-made alterations in the area along the river, the form and quality of these agricultural lands have also changed. Micro-scale attention to the geometric and abstract shape of agricultural farms juxtaposed with the irregularity of the natural world reveals a characterizing component of such micro-spaces. Another feature of these rectangular farms is the vertical elements, wooden walls or plants, built to mark boundaries and ownership. These geometrically defined areas possess a spatial quality that is unique to such man-made spaces and cultivated plants. From a spatial point of view, they differ from the irregularity of the natural world; both internally and externally (Figs 2 & 3). On the other hand, these man-made spaces are distinguishable from other such constructs such as buildings and structures. It can perhaps be said that these in-between spaces are a key characteristic of rural landscapes. So if it is accepted that cities are generally filled with man-made structures, and the natural world is devoid of human constructs and abstraction, these human-made spaces, created in the natural territory, can be considered as elements of the agricultural landscape.

• Agricultural Products

The elements in rural landscapes are a manifestation of immediate human-nature connection resulting in the formation of an ecosystem. Aesthetic pleasure, the experience of the perceptual and emotional characteristics of the landscape through the senses, is part of the inhabitants' lives. Moreover, from an ecologic point of view, the agricultural landscape and its aesthetics appeal is interconnected with the practical benefits it offers to the inhabitants (Sheibani & Sadeghi, 2013, 15-10). The arrangement of agricultural lands and planting system is, on a large scale, one of the most important components shaping rural agricultural landscapes. In traditionally-formed settlements of Iran, the rhythm of urban grain

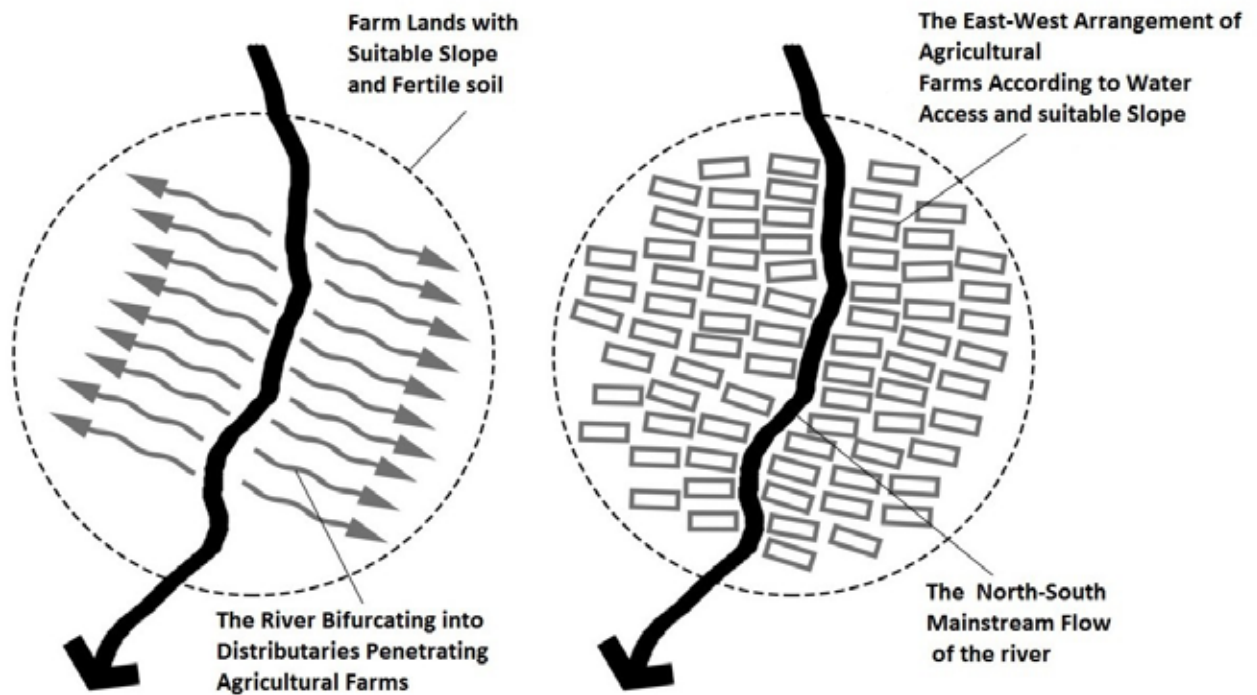


Fig.1. Arrangement of agricultural lands along the Kamu va Chogan River. Source: authors.



Fig. 2. Agricultural lands whose ownership is marked by human-cultivated poplar trees and other such natural obstacles are a landscape component of Kamu va Chogan. Photo: Morteza Hemmati, 2018.



Fig. 3. Poplar trees, a ubiquitous sight as they are planted to mark property boundaries and also for carpentry uses, are an important element in the landscape. Some inhabitants believe the name of the city is partly influenced by the characterizing presence of this plant. Photo: Morteza Hemmati, 2018.

arrangement tends to depend on water supplies. The three factors of water, vegetation (orchards and farms), and architectural fabrics have been the constituent elements of such settlements (Sheibani & Esmaeeldokht, 2015, 14). Agricultural life, being founded on holistic principles, is formed around water and the systems concerned with its use. The relationship between agriculture, infrastructure, and water resources determines the orientation of agricultural landscapes. Consequently, the economy of the village and its overall structure hierarchically follows the direction and presence of water resources. The availability of water in the form of waterways, natural channels, and furrows, is one of the factors shaping the landscape of agricultural lands. In Kamu va Chogan, the water channel originating from Mount Karkas irrigates the village of Kamu and, at a lower altitude, Chogan. However, It is noteworthy that cultivation in these two villages, does not follow the traditional orchard, nursery, and farm organization and a different planting system is observable. This has led to the emergence of distinct qualities for

the agricultural landscape of the area. In Kamu va Chogan, orchards, farms, and nurseries are uniquely integrated due to gradual changes in water resources and consequent shifts in agricultural organization.

Another component of these functional landscapes is the alimentary usage of the fruit provided by trees. Fruits were the first human source of food, predating even wheat. A key characterizing quality of the functional landscape of Kamu va Chogan is the grapevine and its fruit. In addition to its practical functions, the grapevine and its harvest have immaterial values (Fig. 4). An example of this would be the artistic depiction of the grape as a decorative element in the interior part of the Imamzadeh Yousef shrine (Fig. 5). Moreover, the willow tree has a productive function as it provides shade and wood. Furthermore, the growth pattern of these trees along a long-dried river nostalgically reminds its memory. Another point to consider is that trees in Iranian culture are not always valued for their functional uses or their green representation of life and growth. Stone-carved depictions of trees in ancient and historical structures of Iran undoubtedly signify more than mere abstract forms or decorative elements but rather represent sanctity and respect (Sadeghian & Madani, 2009,71). The long-living willow tree plays an important role in giving identity to the landscape of this area. In other words, in the



Fig. 4. The region is known for its grapes which are ubiquitously present in the daily lives of the inhabitants. Photo: Maryam Jalili, 2018.



Fig.5. The willow tree which requires high amounts of water for survival used to be planted alongside the formerly flowing river. With the shift in the course of the river, the willow trees nostalgically mark its memory through the settlement. Photo: Maryam Jalili, 2018.

village of Kamu, the willow tree is identifiable as a landscape component. The poplar tree is another element of the Kamu va Chogan landscape as it is routinely planted around fields to express land ownership and territory. The link between ownership of land and the issue of belonging indicates an emotional factor in the relationship between man and space (Javan Forouzandeh & Motalebi, 2012, 29). Besides, the abundance of poplar trees in Kamu and the use of its wood in all aspects of the inhabitants' lives is a testament to its identificatory function as a landscape element. However, observing the current landscape of Kamu va Chogan shows that the presence of fruit trees, farms, and nurseries has become less prominent. The decrease in agricultural products indicates changes in the landscape of Kamu va Chogan due to the depletion of water resources, immigration of residents, and the lack of collective will to preserve the landscape.

• Agricultural Society

The social structure of each village is formed over

time according to the social interactions of its inhabitants. Examining the village in the context of the social life of its inhabitants is a step towards understanding its concept because human beings' knowledge of any phenomenon depends on the depth of understanding of the processes of that phenomenon (Habibi, 1999). The village is one of the oldest social organizational units where groups of people gather to collectively work towards economic, social, cultural, and political goals. Primitive societies turned to sedentism with the advent of agriculture and the objective manifestation of the concept of habitation led to the formation of settlements (Raheb, 2008, 107). When examining water resources, as the life-giving element, the impact of water as a means of survival should be considered. Over many centuries, these waterways have been the source of great agricultural discoveries (Lahasaeizadeh, 2003, 19). Studies reveal that the natural shape of the terrain and variety in altitude codes of the Karkas ranges has given the spatial organization of Kamu va Chogan a two-level hierarchical structure. It seems that the agricultural economy and natural environmental features such as water resources and terrain have led to the emergence of certain qualities. As Kamu is situated higher on the terrain, it has control over the water originating from the heights of Mount Karkas. This has led to the consequent emergence of a class system still recognizable in the mentality of the inhabitants of both villages as well as in other aspects of their lives. One may frequently encounter names, such as Arbabian, Ra'iyat, and Zare'ian, and social interactions resonating feudal class-based relationships (Fig. 6). Examining different aspects of the social system in Kamu va Chogan as observable in the daily lives and behavioural patterns of its inhabitants indicate that their social relations are based on a class system. This system is a byproduct of the agricultural landscape that produces distinct spatial behaviors and experiences for the inhabitants. However, this agricultural landscape also affects the

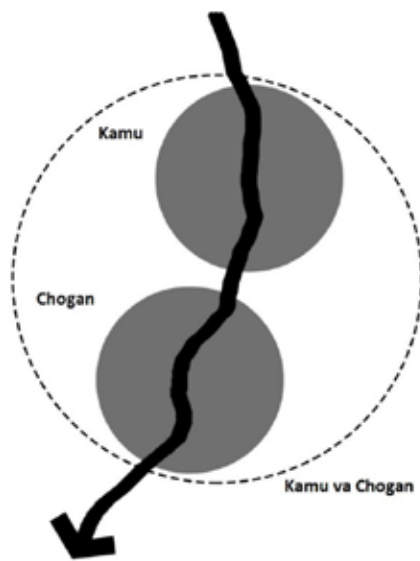


Fig. 6. The village of Kamu being situated above chogan gave them control over the water source and consequently dominance over the village of Chogan. Source: authors.

attitudes of the inhabitants towards their environment. In addition to these influences, there are other aspects of the agricultural society of Kamu va Chogan to consider. For example, the agricultural elements in the names of thoroughfares in the city such as Takestan 1, Takestan 2 (vineyard), etc. signifies the inhabitants' collective awareness of the agricultural landscape elements.

Strategies for the preservation and development of the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan

To identify the elements of the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan and classifying them into conceptual categories from a preservation and development point of view, the most important strategies for each conceptual category are as follows. Strategies are large-scale instructions influenced by general philosophical and scientific theories such as system theory, sustainable development theory, etc. Therefore, the strategic approach has some characteristics of both philosophical and social sciences. In this light, the strategic approach to the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan is not

merely a technical method and practical solution for the development and implementation of urban development plans. The ultimate goal is to ensure sustainable development and improve the quality of life (Mahdizadeh, 2006, 51). Therefore, by recognizing the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan as a whole that emerges through the study of its objective-subjective elements, the following strategies can be presented to guarantee its sustainable development:

Agricultural Lands: Preservation and development of the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan depend on protecting the environment and the identificatory characteristics of its agricultural lands including soil colour and type, terrain slope, arrangement, and territories. To accomplish this, any attempts to improve or preserve these lands should consider the type and red hue of the soil and the natural slope of the mountainous terrain. Moreover, the natural irrigation method has caused these lands to arrange in a west-east formation and any potential development should adhere to this pattern. Finally, marking property territories using naturally-procured obstacles and planted trees should be preserved and further encouraged.

Agricultural Products: The economy of Kamu va Chogan is uniquely organized according to the necessities of agricultural production which needs to be considered on micro and macro levels. On a macro scale, the distinct agriculturally-organized system should be preserved in potential development plans. Moreover, vines, willows, and poplars are key identificatory elements of the agricultural landscape. This means that their environmental, economic, and cultural potential and significance should be valued. It would be beneficial to employ them further for direct (cultivation for environmental and economic benefits) and indirect use (cultural functions).

Agricultural Society: Names, cultural interactions, and social classes have emerged as a result of immediate contact with the natural world over the

years, creating a system of collective memories and concepts. If reproduced and adapted to suit modern needs, these social and cultural achievements can guarantee development for the landscape of Kamu va Chogan without sacrificing its identity.

Conclusion

Rural life is shaped by an ongoing and sustainable connection between human life and the natural world. One of the most fundamental forms of rural subsistence is agriculture. Agriculture is highly compatible with the natural components of the environment where the habitat is situated. Moreover, distinct cultural elements are observable in these types of spaces belonging to the category of the agricultural landscape. Accordingly, the agricultural landscape is a uniform integration of the structural objectivities of the village with the subjective experiences of the inhabitants. Consequently, neglecting any of these two aspects will adversely affect the landscape. Therefore, to understand the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan, one must first examine and understand its landscape elements. Accordingly, the components of the agricultural landscape of the two villages were fully described in three categories including agricultural lands, agricultural products, and agricultural society. In the first category, agricultural lands and their arrangement patterns and planting systems were explained. In the second category, agricultural products, the three prominent plant species of Grapevine (and its fruit), willow, and poplar were discussed with regards to their landscape role. Finally, the agricultural-based society of the two villages and the ways in which the old feudal lord-peasant relationships echo through names and social interactions of the inhabitants were discussed under agricultural society (Table 1). The identity of the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan depends on the abovementioned distinguishing elements. Considering the significance of these components can be effective in the development and implementation

of strategies aimed at preserving and sustainably developing this agricultural landscape.

Endnote

1. Although this settlement is considered as a city today, one of its distinguishing characteristics is that it has preserved its rural structure. The predominance of this feature convinced the researcher to shift from the urban landscape approach towards a rural one.

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Table 1. Categorisation of the elements in the agricultural landscape of Kamu va Chogan. Source: authors.

	Category	Example
The Elements of the Agricultural Landscape of Kamu va Chogan	Agricultural Lands	<p>Soil type: in this area is an identity-making element as it has a distinct red hue because of the iron oxide in it.</p> <p>Terrain: As Kamu va Chogan is situated on the Karkas ranges, its territories are characterised by different degrees of slope. Adjusting to the slope is a fundamental aspect of the irrigation system. Consequently, the general landscape of the agricultural lands is comprised of non-identical but geometric shapes adjusting the slope of the mountain in their own unique way.</p> <p>Orientation: The Kamu va Chogan river and its aqueducts supply the agricultural lands with water. The north-south stretch of the river along the surface has fundamentally affected the east-west arrangement of the said lands.</p> <p>Enclosed natural space: If we accept that cities are generally filled with man-made structures, and the natural world is devoid of human constructs and abstraction, we may consider these human-made spaces created in the natural territory to be unique to agricultural landscapes. Such spaces are predominantly territorialized by the vertical trees or fences around them.</p> <p>Macro: The arrangement of agricultural lands and planting system: The two villages do not follow the general orchard, nursery, and farm models in their traditional sense. This unique pattern of cultivation and organization of agricultural lands is a distinct element of their landscape.</p>
	Agricultural Products	<p>Micro: Grapevine: One of the most prominent features of the landscape of Kamu va Chogan is the grapevine and its fruit. It has functional as well as subjective significance. One example of its cultural significance is the decorative depiction of its fruit in the shrine of Imamzadeh Yousef.</p> <p>The Willow: These water-consuming trees nostalgically mark the now dried-up river which used to flow through the town. Moreover, they are planted and harvested for their wood.</p> <p>The poplar: These trees are also planted for their wood as well as marking property boundaries. They are a ubiquitous part of the landscape of the city.</p>
	Agricultural Community	<p>Kamu is situated higher on the Karkas mountains than Chogan and closer to the water source flowing downwards. As the economy of Kamu va Chogan is agricultural, the superior access of the inhabitants of Kamu to the water source granted them dominance over the village of Chogan. The remnants of the class-based social system stemming from this dominance echoes in the names of the inhabitants (Arbaban, Ra'iyat, and Zare'ian) and their social interactions.</p>

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Hemmati, M.& Amiri, A. (2020). Recognizing the Elements of the Agricultural Landscape in Kamu va Chogan city, Iran. *Journal of Art & Civilization of the Orient*, 8 (29), 27-38.

DOI: 10.22034/jaco.2020.238934.1163

URL: http://www.jaco-sj.com/article_115244_en.html

