Chapter 10
From Utopia to Dystopia: Shushtar-e-No, Endeavour Towards Paradigmatic Shift

M. Reza Shirazi

Abstract In the 1970s, and to meet the needs of the growing urban population, the Iranian government was able to plan for large-scale investments in the housing sector, thanks to suddenly increasing oil revenues. For a while, the western approach to housing and dwelling, crystallised in the proliferating and internationally appreciated style of modern architecture, dominated Iran's new architecture and urban planning. However, a number of architects and urban planners resisted this dominance and tried to create a paradigmatic shift in the approach to housing and dwelling, focusing on the place-specific aspects of the context. The Shushtar-e-No project was an endeavour of this kind. This chapter addresses this paradigmatic shift, focusing on the case of Shushtar-e-No, a satellite city located 2 km from the old city of Shushtar and designed by Kamran Diba. After a short introduction to the political, social, and architectural context of the scheme, the chapter highlights how the architect's unique approach to the built environment promised a paradigmatic shift in the question of housing and dwelling, the aim of which was to 'synthesise' the two modes of tradition and modernity in quest of a 'local style', and to promote a 'social agenda'. Next, an investigation of the current environmental, social, and physical situation of the community will show its degeneration from the initial utopian image into a state of dystopia, which can be linked with both the initial architectural pre-suppositions and with later unexpected political incidents. Ultimately, using Foucauldian terminology, it will be concluded that Shushtar-e-No has transformed to a 'crisis community', a 'forgotten land', which represents a heterotopia *par excellence*.

Keywords Utopia · Dystopia · Paradigmatic shift · Shushtar-e-No · Community design

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10.1 Introduction

The plans and programmes for modernisation of Iran were established during the reign of Reza Shah (1921–1941), and followed by the young Mohammad Reza Shah (1941–1978), who fulfilled his father's dream of creating a massive state structure. The state bureaucracy underwent drastic expansion; a series of seven-year development plans was launched to achieve industrial prosperity. The results included a maximised growth rate and a substantial increase in national revenues. Social programmes enhanced the standard of social life in the fields of education, health, women's participation, the family and so on. All these efforts aimed to bring about a 'Great Civilisation', which aspired to be 'the fifth most industrial state in the world'. As Ervand Abrahamian spells it out, the claim of the time was that 'Iran was at the gates of the Great Civilisation; its future would be more glorious than its past…; its standard of living would soon surpass that of Europe; it would produce a way of life superior to both capitalism and communism…' (Abrahamian 2008: 131).

  This was the context in which large-scale investment was committed to housing by the government, thanks to the sudden increase in oil revenues in the 1970s, necessitating short term construction activities to meet the needs of the growing urban population (Habibi 2008; Madanipour 2006). This goal could be achieved by 'prefabricated or industrial housing, which also sounded suitably in tune with an industrially-aspiring nation' (Diba 1980a: 38). This construction method, using imported materials and assembled on site, neglected local materials and labour, imposed a different life style, and ignored the inhabitants' cultural and social particularities. Although the trend was welcomed by the Western-oriented professionals of the time, some architects who were sufficiently aware of the socio-cultural problems originating from these kinds of housing and construction systems, resisted their logic and dominance, and tried to open up new place-specific perspectives to this issue. To understand these attempts at resistance, it will be helpful to put them into context through a brief retrospective overview.

  The first key steps towards modernist architecture were taken under Reza Shah who tried to bring Iran into the modern world and stimulate modernisation (Abrahamian 1982). Additionally, there was growing attention to the pre-Islamic legitimation of the Kingdom in order to 'Persianise' Iranian culture along pre-Islamic lines (Kamali 1998). In this context, a number of Iranians trained in European universities such as Vartan Avanessian (1896–82), Paul Abkar (1908–70), Gabriel Guevrekian (1900–70), and Keyghobad Zafar (born 1910), 'introduced into Iran a new language that broke all links and continuity with the past' (Micara 1996: 54). On the other hand, European architects or archaeologists such as Maxim Siroux, André Godard and Arthur Pope tried to concretise the nationalist wishes of the government with regard to architectural buildings through 'a superficial repetition of architectural forms, elements and motifs, particularly those of the Achaemenid and Sassanid periods' (Mirmiran 2004: 39) in a nineteenth century Neoclassical European manner based on the 'application of symmetry, hierarchy and geometric

forms' (Diba and Beheshti 2004: 32). The first line of thought was later intensified under Mohammad Reza Shah in both architectural and urban planning projects. For example, Aziz Farmanfarmaian provided the first Master Plan of Tehran in 1968, together with Victor Gruen Associates, in which he followed a Los Angelesian pattern (Habibi and Hourcade 2005) with an extensive focus on physical aspects and the unrelated transfer of ideas from the West 'without pursuing their social objectives' (Madanipour 1998: 208). In his architectural works as well, he was influenced by the universal principles of the International Style, as exemplified in projects such as the Azadi Sports Complex, Ministry of Agriculture, Saman Towers, and Mehr Abad Airport.

Although this paradigm dominated the professional sphere in the 1960s and 1970s, there was a growing tendency towards integrating tradition and modernism in a constructive way, to create an intermediate condition where: 'The primary values of architecture rather than the forms are brought into evidence, defining a more intellectual and abstract idea of tradition' (Micara 1996: 62), thus advocating a paradigmatic shift. This approach, which is observable in certain works of Houshang Seyhoun, was followed more systematically by leading figures such as Kamran Diba, Nader Ardalan, and Hossein Amanat, who suggested a mode of architecture which is not based on the direct employment of architectural forms and decorations, but on new interpretations of traditional primary values, a kind of 'modern regionally-inspired architecture' (Khan 2000: xxxi). This resisted the governing trend of vulgar modernism, and opened a new perspective in which tradition and modernity can combine to generate a new approach. As an attempt to generate a paradigmatic shift, to instil an overwhelming new paradigm, this could never achieve success. However, this was not due to any lack of theoretical grounding or capacity in its prominent figures, nor due to the reluctance of the architectural profession, but as the result of the radical political changes that took place in the wake of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. This led the burgeoning bottom-up paradigmatic shift to degrade into an ideological top-down call for an Islamic architecture and urbanism, an ambitious aspiration which has never been realised on the ground, nor even taken seriously by professionals.

As a prominent figure, Kamran Diba was deeply aware of the necessity of highlighting place-specific particularities and linking architecture to its socio-cultural context, and as a result designed some architectural and urban works which deserve more attention and contemplation. The Shushtar-e-No project is a work of this kind, in which the two factors of 'housing' and 'regionally-inspired architecture' come together in a creative and innovative way. This article intends to clarify how the Shushtar-e-No complex represented a call for a paradigmatic shift in the question of community and collective dwelling, by means of architectural and urban initiatives and innovations proposed by its architect. This utopian image, however, degraded into a disastrous condition after the project's half-realisation, to the extent that it is now more dystopian, portraying a 'crisis community' far removed from its original 'image'. To figure out the reasons behind this degradation, the role of architectural miscalculations and the subsequent unsystematic developments in housing policy will be discussed.

Prior to focusing on the architectural and urban characteristics of the work, it will be helpful to highlight some critical aspects of the architect's philosophy, which will help us to better understand his unique approach to designing this complex.

10.2   Synthesis of Tradition and Modernity Through the Architecture of Resistance

Diba's architecture is formed by a continuous endeavour to combine tradition and modernity, to create, as he explains, 'a dialectic and synthesis' between these two modes (Diba 1998: 87). He regards the indigenous architecture and culture of Iran as precious sources, but, at the same time, that an absolute emphasis on tradition may lead to a reactionary position and halt creativity. Therefore, a safer approach is to synthesise the two modes of tradition and modernity in a creative way. It is precisely this synthetic approach which makes Diba's contribution to the above-mentioned paradigmatic shift a very significant one.

For Diba, modernism is not merely a physical agenda addressing the appearance of the built environment, but rather a 'social programme' which focuses on human values and ideas (Javaherian and Diba 2005). However, he criticises the Western imposition of values as well as scientific, technological, and production methods in less-developed countries and argues that the 'Loss of independence and perhaps a perceived humiliating subjugation to Western ideas and values has brought about an identity crisis in Islamic societies' (Diba 2002: 119). The irony is, he asserts, that while sometimes aware of the problems of this phenomenon, all Islamic societies with different ideologies are building a 'western-style metropolitan life' and re-produce the same high-rise buildings, slums, and mega-transportation systems at the expense of social coherence and the environment. He states that this endeavour is more superficial than constructive, because 'while Islamic societies are arguing over the design of the buttons, the suit is being produced according to the Occidental model' (Diba 2002: 120). In this sense, Diba highlights the importance of the container, not the ornaments; he instigates a quest to provide urban enclaves which address the very cultural and social identity of society. In fact, the 'search for a local style' has always been Diba's desire and inclination (Diba 2010: 125), a goal which is to be achieved through simultaneous attention to the universal and the particular.

This belief in synthesising modes of tradition and modernity makes Diba sensitive to the overwhelming tendencies of the time, which have overemphasised the modern side. As Diba states, Shushtar-e-No project was a 'reaction' against prevailing trends in contemporary Iranian architecture, mainly influenced by modernism and the International Style, with their extensive inattention to the everyday world of the people and their traditional lifestyles based around the essential role of neighbourhoods (Diba 1998). This reaction could be understood as a 'peripheral movement' taking place in an era when progressive architecture and urban planning

were essentially in thrall to the International Style and modernism. Thus, in this context of extreme modernisation and universalisation, Diba advocates resistance against the dominant architectural paradigm, to awaken policy makers and developers to its emerging dangers. This sense of resistance, for example, can be seen in Diba's opposition to the development plan for the Imam Reza Shrine in Mashhad, where the aim was to destroy the old historical context around the shrine to provide space for new developments and urban facilities. His argument was that urban life is organic in form, so cuts to the existing urban texture will simultaneously demolish urban life. His efforts, though unsuccessful, convey his resistance to vulgar modernist approaches to urban development (Diba 2010: 145–146).

In the case of Shushtar-e-No, this resistance played a vital role, with much effort put into convincing developers to go beyond the dominant presuppositions concerning mass housing production and encouraging them to refer to more indigenous concepts of dwelling and housing. Contrary to the earlier Imam Reza Shrine, he was this time successful in convincing the client and was able to incorporate his ideas in the body of the project. This enabled him to design a unique residential complex through a mixture of innovative envisioning and programmes.

10.3   Shushtar-e-No, A General View

In 1974, the agro-industrial complex Kesht-o Sanat-e Karoun decided to plan a residential and urban complex for its employees. In 1975 D.A.Z. Architects, headed by Kamran Diba, were commissioned to prepare plans. Shushtar New Town (Shushtar-e-No) was a new residential community, a satellite city containing houses, schools, a commercial centre, and a mosque, to house around 25–30,000 white- and blue-collar workers from the aforementioned company. It is adjacent to the city of Shushtar in Khuzestan, southern Iran, located to the north of the city, and only 2 km away from the city centre, divided from it by the Shatit River but connected via the Shadravan Bridge. The city of Shushtar is an ancient city which follows the traditional urban pattern typical of Iranian cities. The original urban fabric still preserved and observable from the time of its design, is compact and interwoven, with mud-brick as the predominant construction material (Diba 1986).

In Shushtar-e-No the spinal cord of a main axis extending from end to end of the complex serves as a connector through which all the major components, districts, and activities are linked together. On the eastern side, an open space provides a location where local farmers can sell their vegetables and other foodstuffs, and thus connects the hinterland activities to the urban fabric; a progressive idea which may hinder the extreme segregation of the city from its surrounding agricultural zones. A covered street bazaar culminates in a green public space at the heart of the central residential quarter. A commercial centre is located in the middle with spaces arranged around a courtyard. This neighbourhood has its own local bathhouse as well as a local mosque. The main axis is continued with the community and cultural centre. The Friday Mosque is located at a high point at the mid-point of the long
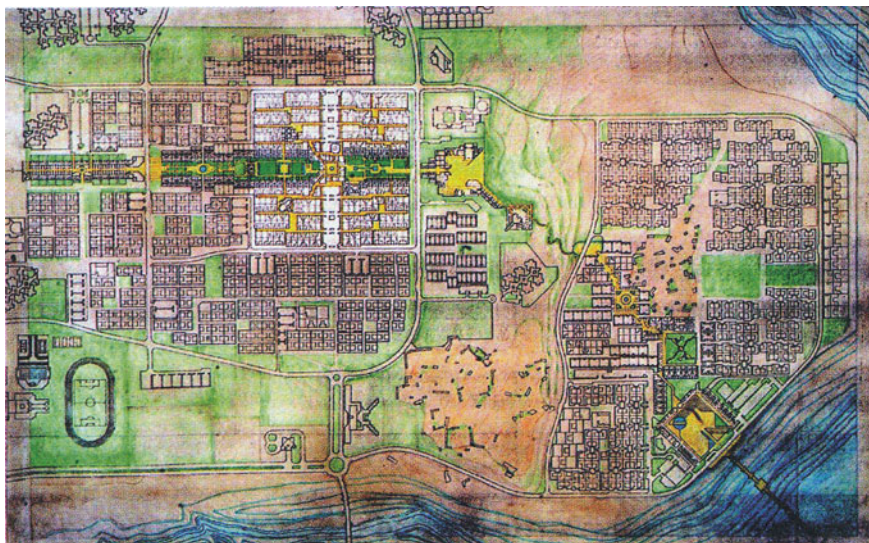
Fig. 10.1 Site plan of Shuhstar-e-No. Reproduced with permission of Kamran Diba

pedestrian boulevard within a man-made forest. The main axis continues with a pedestrian square and then a park, and finally culminates in the town square (Maidan-e Shahr), with dimensions of 100 × 100 m, which is connected to the old city via a pedestrian bridge and works as the principle urban space unifying the old and new towns (Javaherian and Diba 2005; Diba 1981) (Fig. 10.1).

Different types of residential units have been arranged around this spinal cord. Other urban facilities such as different types of schools are distributed in the area within an accessible distance. A main sports facility is located in the south-western area, a bus station in the south. Two bridges connect the complex to the old city. The construction of the project began in 1976, and all five phases were to be completed by 1985. However, due to the ensuing political transformation, the first phase was only partially built, representing some 650 homes, with the mosque, library, and some public spaces remaining uncompleted (Diba 1985).

A range of architectural innovations come together to make this project unique, addressing different aspects from environmental adaptability to social agenda, from the micro scale of residential units up to the macro scale of public spaces. One of the project's main distinctive features derives from the 'social agenda' Diba has envisaged for this complex. Diba's attention to public space and social interaction can be traced back to his interest in society and social sciences, which had concerned him to the extent that he studied sociology for one year at a post-graduate level (Diba 2010). He writes: 'I became fascinated by the laws that govern social systems. Understanding social situations not only introduced a new challenge and a new dimension to my work, it led to an anti-architectural attitude' (Diba 1981: 8). He had been intrigued by the social expression seen in the street life of his country,

where groups idle on street corners, parade themselves in the course of shopping expeditions and interact. On this basis, he understands a built structure as a 'social event', 'an environment which multiplies and enhances the quality of interaction' (ibid.). A main task for an architect, he believes, as with a theatre director, is organising and setting the stage for certain human situations and providing users with the possibility of interaction. This tendency towards public architecture is so high that Diba has mainly designed public projects, and has always declined to take on commissions for villas and private houses, except in the case of one designed for a sculptor friend, Parviz Tanavoli (Diba 2010).

Diba's interest in public spaces is well illustrated in Shafagh Park (1966–69), his first architectural work in Iran. The central concept was a programme for 'a community centre' consisting of two small libraries for adults and children, a workshop for children, a community hall and offices dedicated to different welfare organisations, as a place for socialising and social participation (Diba 1981). Encouraging social interaction is also a key point in Shushtar-e-No, so that Diba talks about a 'social agenda' (Javaherian and Diba 2005) for the town. A main pedestrian and social 'spine' consisting of a series of paved squares, lush gardens, covered and shaded resting places, fountains and running water, which are lined with schools and bazaars, has been designed to stimulate socialisation. All the streets and passages culminate in this spine, encouraging people to socialise (Diba 1981). This scheme, similar to the pedestrian pathway of Jondi-Shapour, now Shahid Chamran University, stems from the idea of a 'human interaction-intensification program', that is, 'enhancing the quality and quantity of human interaction by means of physical, spatial organisation' (Diba, 3: 54).

A more private sense of public space has been provided in front of some houses, where the house meets the street, as 'extensions of houses where children play and parents chat' (Diba 1981: 186). This realm was to be a semi-private, semi-public one at the service of the inhabitants and neighbours. As Diba puts it, 'The basic attempt was to create a socio-physical entity conducive to collective interaction, togetherness and strong community ties' (ibid., 186).

The presence of public space is amplified by the neighbourhood plaza, where a shaded area is provided with shops and tea houses, and by the neighbourhood mosque in the middle of the residential quarter, which follows the traditional pattern in terms of its integration with the surroundings (Fig. 10.2). At the city scale, the main plaza (Maidan-e Shahr), a 100×100 m^2, was to be situated on the river bank, and connected to the old city through a pedestrian bridge. This unrealised Maidan, as the connector of the old and new city, was to house government offices, a hotel, apartments, arcade shops, and cultural activities such as cinemas.

Due to Shushtar's geographic location, the climate is tough and harsh, and the precipitation rate very low. To mitigate these severe conditions, the planning concept of the city is dense in pattern with deep and narrow brick-paved streets, so that the buildings provide shading for living and traffic spaces. This is significant when the existing hot climate necessitates natural cooling. Such cooling occurs when the heat rising from streets is cooled by breezes and also through surface water drainage. In the central shopping centre, deep arcades provide shaded
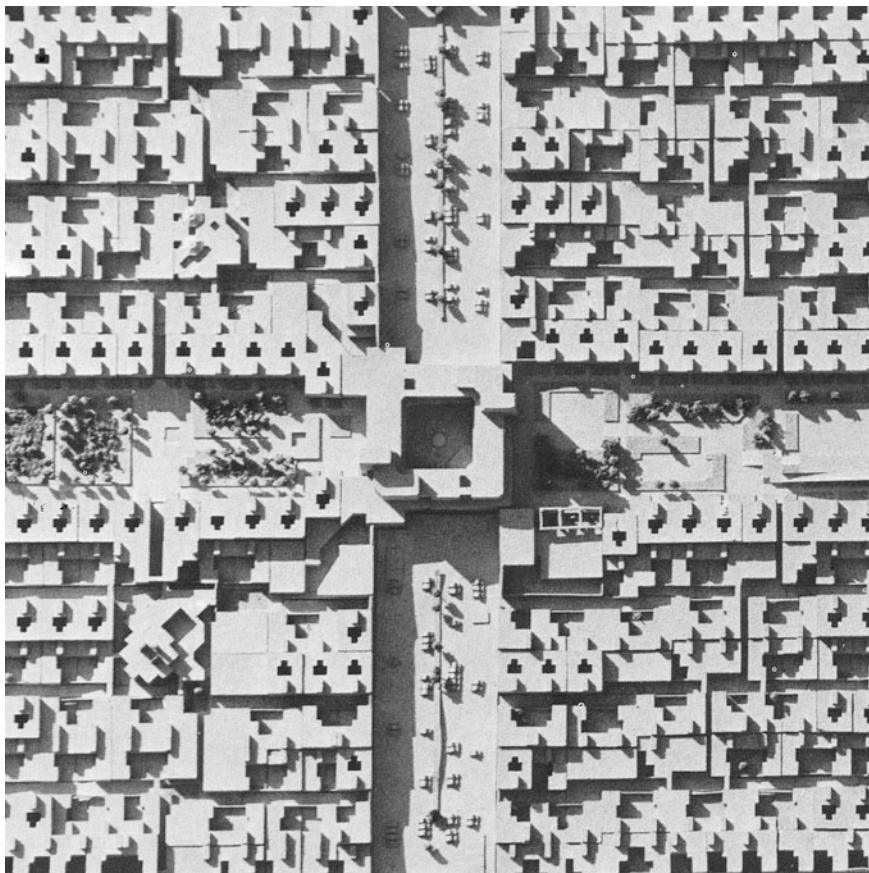
Fig. 10.2 Central residential quarter and neighbourhood plaza. Reproduced with permission of Kamran Diba

passages for the public (Diba 1980b) (Fig. 10.3). In individual buildings, thick walls and small windows on the shady side of the dwellings reduce the convection effect. Access to dwellings is normally through a porchway which provides a cool place for socialising. Roofs can be accessed by steps for the evening sleep, and brick screens provide shading without spoiling interior privacy (Diba 1986).

For Diba, the high-rise building is a serious enemy of a humane community. He believes that the cultural particularity of Muslim societies resists this kind of unfamiliar dwelling: 'We Muslims should avoid high-rises and create density horizontally' (Diba 2002: 121). Based on this argument, the majority of dwellings—about 80 %—are one- or two-storey houses; the rest are apartments. With regard to the housing concept, contrary to the Western notion of the house as an agglomeration of different rooms with particular functions such as living room, dining room and bedroom, the traditional concept of the room as a flexible unit was the departure

Fig. 10.3 Central shopping centre with deep arcades (Author 2011)

point, whereby large spaces are multi-purpose and potentially divisible. 'We planned two and three-room housing units which could become a four, five or six-room house as the family's standard of living improved' (Diba 1980b: 42). This flexible configuration, which Diba calls 'soft furniture' (Javaherian and Diba 2005), enables inhabitants to move between different spaces to avoid or enjoy the sunshine at different seasons. Rooms are medium sized at 5 × 5, 4 × 4, and the smallest at 3 × 4 m. On this flexibility Diba writes: 'Our goal was akin to writing a script for human interaction, anticipating all possible action and yet leaving room for spontaneous improvisation within the given architectural spaces' (Diba 1980b: 43).

In conceptualising the dwelling units, the courtyard was the main source of inspiration. Rooms are gathered around a courtyard, as the open space at the heart of the dwelling unit. This archetypal configuration, rooted in the Middle Eastern style of settlement and accommodation, has always been reinterpreted in poetic ways in Diba's architecture. In the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (1967–76) this archetype is formulated as an inner outdoor sculpture court, around which galleries are organised along a beltway. This feature is later used in the Administrative Building and Mosque of Jondi-Shapour University (1968–72), as well as in the Cultural Centre of Niavaran Garden (1970–78).

In Shushtar-e-No, a mid-technology approach has been employed using local technology in terms of materials and construction methods. Footings are of concrete, and the roofs are framed with steel beams supported by walls or engaged

piers. The spaces between piers are filled by traditional brick barrel-vaults, over which concrete paving blocks are laid to form the final roof. Floor finishes are terrazzo tiles laid on concrete slabs. Most of the materials were produced locally. Not only was the contractor local, but the labour force consisted of unskilled labourers of whom 90 % were Iranian, and 10 % Afghan. The professionals employed on the project, including architects, engineers, and consultants, were 95 % Iranian (Diba 1986). Thus, this project was essentially dependent on local technology and a local work force, offering job opportunities for local artisans during the construction period.

A crucial problem with the Muslim traditional environment, according to Diba, is the uncontrolled nature of vehicular traffic circulation, the result of which is the attenuation of the quality and scale of the environment, and a reduction of the community as it becomes subservient to the car (Diba 2002). In opposition to this, Diba advocates the separation of the vehicular transport system from pedestrians. In Shushtar-e-No all parking zones are located at particular strategic points, to segregate the automobile from the community life. Parking plots are subsidiary to urban life and social interaction, and most public places are car-free zones.

Greenery is limited to courtyards and inhabitants are encouraged to create private green spaces within their houses. The reason is high maintenance costs of greenery and the possible future lack of maintenance services, which could degrade exterior green spaces and spoil urban vistas. Interior green spaces are sited close to the exterior, to provide shade for passengers. The only greenery is a few rows of trees along the sidewalks of the exterior highway and the main 'spine'.

This thematic review highlights distinct approaches implemented in this work that make it unique, such as simultaneous attention given to the local and the universal, highlighting social aspects of community life, and giving the building a tectonic character. These characteristics are quite enough to have convinced Kenneth Frampton, the architectural critic and theorist, to refer to this work as a prominent example of critical regionalism at the urban scale (Khan 2000).

10.4 From Utopia to Dystopia

Despite all these potentialities and capacities, the destiny of this project is one of an unfortunate decline, from an image of utopia to a state of dystopia. Utopias are sites of perfection. As the word 'utopia' suggests, they are a negation of place, a non-place. This non-placeness, however, indicates that utopia is essentially different from our common imagination of the 'place'. It illustrates an 'image' of perfection, to provide some pointers to a better condition. Shushtar-e-No has this kind of character.

For Diba, Shushtar-e-No was designed to construct a utopian image of a better society, detached from the problematics of the 'real, existing space', and thus a promise of a radical shift from the dominant paradigm of 'dwelling' and 'community' which had little to do with the authenticity and factuality of the given place.

The 'real space' of the dominant paradigm was that overwhelming semi-modernist approach in architecture and urban planning, which he resisted intensively. His utopian community was not the traditional homogeneous community of the past, nor the heterogeneous community of the present, but an ideal community of the future which mingles the past with the present in a constructive way. All the characteristics Diba intends to realise in his utopian world are either not-yet-extant, or what should exist. In this sense, his objective was designing an ideal place with a 'utopian vision', a place which is far removed from the unpleasant, overwhelming regularities of conformity, and opens new perspectives into the question of 'dwelling' and 'community'. This utopian vision, thus, was to be achieved through an 'architecture of resistance' which neither compromises the wishes of the client and policy makers, nor condones the rules of universal marketing. On the utopian vision of the project we read: 'Our goal was akin to writing a script for human interaction, anticipating all possible action yet leaving room for spontaneous improvisation within the given architectural spaces' (Diba 1980b: 43).

This utopian vision is observable in different aspects of the project, from its unique re-interpretation of traditional prototypes, to its encouragement of social interaction and enhancements to the public sphere, to environmentally progressive ideas of restricting private traffic. This is more understandable when the general trend of contemporary construction in Iran is taken into account, in which the intention was to follow universal patterns of mass housing and high-rise construction. However, this utopia was something 'imagined' in the mind, or an 'image' on the chapter. The realised place was soon transformed into a state of dystopia far from the utopian vision of its original conception.

At the beginning, the management of Shushtar-e-No was under the supervision of the Karoun Agro-industry Society. Soon after the first inhabitants were settled, major problems arose. The maintenance of the city was problematic, the ditches were dirty and drinking water was rationed. Immediately after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, this area was overpopulated by war-stricken individuals, inhabitants of neighbouring villages, as well as multiple worker families living in the same house in overcrowded conditions.

Later, the degradation process did not stop, but was exacerbated. Houses were extensively adapted, without any regard for the context. Newly installed gas pipes were exposed on facades. For security reasons, metal fences were erected to protect low-level windows as well as entry points. Windows at a low height facing streets were frequently walled up. Air conditioning fittings were installed over some windows. Brick pavements were replaced by tarmac or whatever material found.

The lack of urban services is disturbing: everywhere is littered with rubbish and waste. There is no efficient sewage system. Public squares have been left unattended: they are abandoned terrains with no service and maintenance. Green space is scarce, with no regular irrigation (Fig. 10.4). Semi-private exterior courtyards, probably designed on the model of front yards of American suburbia (Javaherian and Diba 2005) and supposed to be mediatory green spaces between the private and public realms, are either devastated, or walled in. The shopping centre is dilapidated, far from its original state. The architect's intention in establishing a live city

Fig. 10.4 Public space left unattended (Author 2011)

centre has failed. Balconies (Ivans) have been extensively added to the interior space using any available material. More recently, most units were sold off by the municipality to public functionaries. The first phase which was planned for 4000 inhabitants has now more than 10,000 inhabitants. Consequently, the property values are very low compared to surrounding areas. In general, there is no vitality, dynamism, and sense of life in the town, and no sign of future improvements.

10.5   Discussion

The existing conditions of the complex can be observed from two perspectives: the initial gap between the utopian ideas of the designer and the real life of inhabitants, and the subsequent challenges that arose due to unexpected socio-political conditions.

Although this complex was never occupied by the people of the Kesht-o Sanat-e Karoun, the way current inhabitants have reacted to some of its architectural concepts, and recent architectural interventions, show that its current appearance would be partially similar even if the complex were inhabited according to the original agenda. There is enough evidence to claim that even the inhabitants originally envisaged for the scheme would react similarly to some of its

Fig. 10.5 Front gardens are mainly walled off (Author 2011)

architectural ideas, as similar treatments are observable in most low-income as well as middle-class housing projects all over the country. For example, exterior windows located at a visible height are inimical to residents' desire for privacy and security, so they have fixed this by haphazard walling and fencing off of windows. Most residents have also walled off semi-private front gardens to add to their sense of ownership, as they do not feel themselves responsible to the public (Fig. 10.5). A similar customisation has taken place with most balconies, which have been absorbed into the dwelling's interior for privacy or ownership reasons (Fig. 10.6). Moreover, cars are taken into the dwelling area by building into the courtyard of a garage-like space with wide doors, or are parked in front of them, and the public parking places are left unused. All these adaptations indicate that some architectural ideas were questionable from the beginning, regardless of their inhabitants, and in contrast to common understanding of the Iranian mode of dwelling and living.

On the other hand, a considerable part of the problem has originated from later unexpected conditions. The construction phase was stopped after the political unrest of 1979 and the subsequent revolutionary situation. First, the main objective of a community which could accommodate the white and blue collar workers of the Kesht-o Sanat-e Karoun Company was not achieved, as the company left the plan semi-realised after the Islamic Revolution. Later, war-stricken refugees were settled there, establishing an instance of what we can call, following Foucault, a 'crisis community' who are 'in relation to society and to the human environment in which

Fig. 10.6 Balconies merged into the interior (Author 2011)

they live, in a state of crisis' (Foucault 1998). War-afflicted people were the people in crisis, having been dislodged from their own homes due to the violence, and mainly consisted of poor people from the villages or poor cities of the region. The main idea of re-settling them was to provide them with a safe 'shelter', while the quality of life was less important. After the war, a proportion of the inhabitants left to return to their original homes, and their houses were occupied in an unsystematic way by new dwellers from the surrounding villages who had migrated to the urban areas. The state of crisis continued or even deteriorated, and this accelerated due to the inattention of the municipality and other governmental institutions in providing minimum urban facilities and public services.

Moreover, the initial idea of connecting Shushtar-e-No to the old city of Shushtar failed, due to its incomplete construction. Located outside the historic city, it established itself as an isolated realm tending to severe social and cultural segregation and disconnection. This was exacerbated by the establishment of what we have called a 'crisis community', a second hand community displaced from their origins and home. The result was a 'microcosm' characterised by its disadvantages, social problems, and lower-class migrants. It was a 'forgotten land'. This microcosm was identified with poverty, misery, and misfortune.

10.6   Conclusion

The Shushtar-e-No project is a distinctive work from a number of points of view. It is a housing project that provides residential facilities for labourers employed by an agro-industrial complex which has been developed at a period of economic boom. However, it tries to establish a unique community which goes beyond the dominant rules and principles of contemporary construction, offering a third way in which tradition and modernism are effectively linked together. It thus promises a radical shift from the dominant architectural and building paradigm essentially influenced by modernism and the International Style. The initial vision is to some degree utopian, in the sense that an ideal, but inexistent manner of 'dwelling' and 'community' is projected. But this 'image,' which seemed to work perfectly at a conceptual level, was never realised on the ground; the result was a dystopia per se, far from the project's initial objectives and ideals.

This dystopia was resulted from two main impediments: firstly, the gap between the designer's imagined ideal and the user's actual handling, as indicated by the later treatment by the inhabitants; and secondly and mainly, the subsequent unexpected socio-political conditions, which led to the misuse of the original project for short-term problem solving. Currently, Shushtar-e-No suffers from a plethora of serious problems and challenges.

Shushtar-e-No oscillates between two senses of heterochrony: on the one hand, the nostalgic time of the traditional architecture and city to which the plan of the city is indebted; and on the other, the solid time of the recent past, namely the disturbing memory of the war and its terrible aftermath. These two sides of heterochrony point to a disturbing memory from which individuals prefer to escape. While this community is open to the public, it is unattractive to visitors due to its catastrophic conditions. Nevertheless, visitors could potentially be attracted by the distinctive approach that its famous architect employed in creating its design. It is visited by architects to learn from its hidden lessons, or by sociologists to study its social challenges: not as a solution, but as a problem.

Shushtar-e-No is a heterotopia *par excellence*.

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