Original Research Article

Principles of a "Cross-Cultural Landscape"
Between Iran and Oman*

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Abstract | The expansion of communication in today's world has led to growing relations between different cultures in various fields. The outcome is the emergence of concepts such as the global village, globalization, and culture generation. The challenge faced by the world today is the method with which cultures with different values and structures relate to each other. Architecture, as one of the elements most influenced by culture, is by the same token influenced by expanding communications and requires an adequate response to achieve the rudiments of cultural interaction. Many researchers in the field of architecture and landscape architecture have studied the effects of culture on architecture and presented certain principles on the subject. Presently, the influx of cultural connections worldwide raises the following question: What principles does the environment which is formed under the influence of two or more different cultures follow? To this end, previous research on the influence of culture was first investigated and the discourse continued with the analysis of the cultural characteristics of the two countries of Iran and Oman. The research methodology also includes the comparative analysis of existing theories in the formation of a cross-cultural landscape, culture-influenced architecture, and the adaptation of concepts and theories to the realities on the ground. As a result, by presenting the common identifiers of landscapes influenced by the culture of both countries, it has been stated that the architectural landscape of Iran and Oman have a very close identity and it is possible for the two countries to form a cross-cultural framework. Finally, to achieve the aims of the research, recommendations have included exploiting common cultural values, using mechanisms that have been influenced by compatible cultures to shape the architectural landscape, using architectural and landscape shaping mechanisms influenced by the aligned culture, referring to the common symbols and models of both cultures by relying on religious structures and beliefs and avoiding emphasis on anti-value structures.

Introduction| Influenced by culture, architectural works have accepted changes in their general structure which are evident at first glance. Much research shows that diverse cultural identities in global communities have, in general, had a special influence on architecture. These include beliefs, customs, skills, creativity, and many more ethical identities and different cultural structures (Bourdieu, 1998). Today, the phenomenon known as "cross-cultural architecture" not only has valuable meaning for communities, but it can also benefit both cultures as a nursery bed for economic and even political investment, to be used for culture building in other contexts. Witnessing the phenomena linked to culture narrates

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the transformation of approaches to architecture in the contemporary world. Studies suggest the importance of paving the way for cultural interaction, such as creating cultural focal points. These points include components of an identity platform that engages in cultural interaction and the particular traits of that culture (Park, Burgess & McKenzie, 1925). Toffler calls the architectural and cultural challenges ahead a "cultural explosion", resulting in emerging challenges between the requirements of people in multicultural societies and ambiguities in cultural indicators. The present research aims to achieve an adequate understanding of the cross-cultural approach in architecture and use this as its mainstay to reach a specific basis for the formation of distinct cross-cultural architecture and landscape. Architecture has always been influenced by culture. Therefore, it is assumed that a cross-cultural interaction in architecture means that there is a similar vein running through the cultures of the two countries in other areas too. Hence, the cross-cultural interaction which takes place at different levels, such as in international relations, also takes place in the surrounding environment. But the difference is that the process culminates in the formation of the architectural body and landscape. As such, it can be forecast that the formation of a cross-cultural landscape between the two platforms with common denominators and values is a median indicator of their values which, while united, have their own particular components.

Problem Statement

The present research aims to present a comprehensive structure for the cross-cultural interaction which takes place between two societies that can be generalized to other cultural contexts. To this end, the cultural components affecting the vernacular architecture and landscape of Iran and Oman were reviewed by underpinning their common background, and efforts were made to compile a framework for the cross-cultural landscape between these two geographical regions. As such, the research is based on two points: 1) Analyzing views on the topic of cross-cultural interaction and the phenomena which take shape based on common cultures, and 2) Verifying the characteristics and identity of the cultural landscape of the said countries. Questions arise in the process, such as what components affect the formation of a cross-culture? How do the identifiers of the two cultural platforms that make up the architecture and the cross-cultural landscape impact the physical structure? And despite the many differences, how does communication between cultures lead to similarities in architectural output?

Methodology

The main process of the research in the first instance was to investigate the existing views and approaches in the discourse on the formation of a cross-cultural landscape and present a structure based on transforming cultural values into landscape models. In the next step, the special features and important components were extracted and investigated in a comparative study, introducing the indicators which form the theoretical foundations of the cross-cultural landscape between Iran and Oman. To present the architectural indicators and the influence of the cultures of both countries on them, two methods can be used: 1) The library method can be used by referring to sources and books on the history and heritage of architecture and investigating architectural models and indicators in both contexts, and 2) Filed study which is another method whereby one can travel to different regions to investigate and analyze historical and contemporary works and understand the true effects of culture on the surrounding environment from among the similarities and differences. Both methods were used in this research. Initial research shows that the comparison of architecture in both countries has not been scientifically compiled or their common components from the past to date specifically codified, but indicators for each one can be revealed by studying available documents. In continuation, conducting cultural field studies can help extract the intended components and move away from the confusion created by mere theoretical information on cultural topics.

Glocalization as an Effective Challenge to the Emergence of the "Cross-Cultural Landscape"

Culture is a complicated subject that includes the knowledge, art, technology, beliefs, and customs of a community. But to enter this realm, all of the aforementioned must be displayed in a tangible structure (Park, Burgess & McKenzie, 1925, 75). The most significant cultural manifestations come as tangible phenomena such are artworks. Hence, culture requires material identifiers. To this end, architecture can play a significant role, because it arises from the beliefs and spiritual thoughts of a society based on creative ideas pertaining to a historical era and way of thinking. Thus, recognizing the cultural structure will aid the cognition of thoughts supporting architecture (Memmott & Keys, 2015). The analysis of the material sphere stemming from cultural values in living environments is a topic derived from the discussions of many urban sociologists who have studied the connection between spatial systems and cultural structures. Of these, one can name the works of Wirth (1938), Simmel (1955), Weber (1962), Durkheim (1964), Harvey (1973), and Castells (1977). Their way of thinking is often rooted in the Chicago School which is known for framing the sociology and cultural theory of urban development.

According to this theory, the place-based behavior of people and attention to environmental parameters in design is based on social structures and every manmade space is derived from cultural beliefs. Today, examining the compatibility between the cultural structures of one community with another has become a major challenge among theorists (Baronet & Muller, 1974). At a time when the world had been globalized and there is an explosion of information among most social groups regardless of their location, people have a similar view of culture. This fact is coupled with the blurring of geographical boundaries with cultural boundaries, leading to the unification of cultural structures despite social differences and ultimately to the change of attitudes in different cultures. Hence, in this day and age, cultural interaction in all aspects of human life is as inevitable as trade. Globalization takes steps toward eliminating cultural boundaries under the auspices of social media to achieve integration. By displaying the common aspects of cultures, it is trying to present a model for all peoples to feel present on the global stage regardless of their cultural differences. Of course, the process of cultural acceptance is a conflicting feeling between accepting a new culture and its feedback. This has three aspects: absorption, integration, and feedback. But the push-and-pull of uncompromising acculturation in various societies often leads to a defensive reaction by people of a different culture which not only prevents the expansion and acceptance of the new culture, it also increases the negative approach to the opposite culture. Many communities have taken measures to oppose the global culture. Therefore, adapting to the cultural background is very important, to the extent that if the architectural work is not compatible with the cultural structure of the people, it will be rejected by the users (Bonenberg, 2011, 112-113). This is why globalization has been outdated to a large extent. Instead, the media is trying to present culture with a native identity in an international format for every community. This is called glocalization or aligning global approaches with local circumstances (Robertson, 1994, 41). This is an attractive approach to balancing globalization and localization and strengthening the connection between people and global and transcultural values. In the meantime, by reflecting many of the characteristics of a single culture, landscape architecture can give a special, unique identity to a place and create visual attractions with models supported by that culture while dissociating these from the identifiers of other cultural models. The emergence of the concept of "cultural landscape" based mainly on its special interpretations of cultural heritage on the one hand (Eshrati & Hanachi, 2015), and the concentration of this interpretation on one particular cultural position on the other, makes the emergence of transcultural approaches

in landscape architecture more significant by twofold. The cross-cultural landscape seeks to highlight what is common between two cultures. In this way, it strengthens cultural relations and emphasizes the essence of paying attention to the element of culture in today's relations to moderate the challenges arising from globalization. Some of the factors which lead to success despite the challenges are as follows:

• Aspects of similarity despite uniqueness: This is a collection of special features in an environment, which, despite distinctive differences, still bear similarities (traditions such as lifestyle and activities such as shipping and maritime trade, fishing, and types of handicrafts, agriculture, irrigation, etc).

• Intimate universal familiarity: The intimate familiarity of people with a collection of phenomena (e.g. natural elements such as the sea) in general, based on their particular characteristics which make these more favored than other existing examples within other cultural contexts.

• Common cultural taste: This is a collection of features that shows the common taste of people in two or more cultures (e.g. type of clothes, food, etc), rooted in the taste and creativity of that community.

• Local and regional symbols: This is a collection of signs and symbols in local architecture, which expresses the type of common responses to climatic and geographical issues of that community (e.g. elements such as wind…).
Cultural manifestations: Works that express the traditions, culture, history, and memories that make up the identity values of a community and can be identified in the architectural elements (e.g. local dialect, common stories, customs, etc).

Therefore, the landscape is formed based on the cross-cultural approach through intervention in the following elements: cultural background of society, history, tradition, lifestyle, and technology; type of reaction to natural elements such as water, fire, earth, and air; methods of using architectural elements such as walls, floors, and ceilings; design concepts and spatial structures; shaping elements such as staircases, edges, axes, distinctive points; and the architectural narrative in the context of ornaments, façades, design elements, and cultural models.
By stressing the above-mentioned factors, the cross-cultural landscape can be envisaged as a culture that is the combination of two or more cultures, taking place based on three components: shared values, differences, and contradictions.

Iran-Oman Historical Background: Paving the Way for a Cross-Cultural Landscape
Relations between Iran and Oman go back a long way in history. Large portions of this country were always part

of the Persian Empire from Achaemenid times to the Sassanid era, and following the advent of Islam. Political and trade ties between the two in the Islamic era had their peaks and troughs, leading to a gradual separation from the Iranian territory with the spread of colonialization in the Persian Gulf. Hence, Iran-Oman relations are impacted by geographical, geopolitical, and civilizational factors, and are distinctly different from Iranian relations with other Arab countries in the region (Al-Salimi, Gaube & Korn, 2013). To some archaeologists, the history of Oman dates back to five thousand years ago. Its initial inhabitants were the Hamis or Black Africans who began to decline after wars with the Sami tribes. Based on available evidence, the historic name of Oman around 2000 years ago was Magan or Mazon. It was ruled by powerful sovereigns like Hamirian and its capital was the city of Rebedan whose old name was Zofar. Assyrian and Elamite texts have referred to the land of Majan and its prospering shipbuilding industry. During different historic periods in Oman, trade was emphasized in its relations with its neighboring countries. The word "Majan" in the local language meant copper mine the excavation of which flourished in the area. The word "Mezon" or "Mazon" meant flowing waters (Fig. 1). Historically, the trade in frankincense in Oman was more valuable than gold as its most profitable export. In the 2nd century CE, three thousand tons of frankincense was shipped to Greece, Rome, and other Mediterranean cities every year, indicating the importance of Oman as a trading hub in the ancient Persian Empire. To date, it has still kept this trading structure by replacing it with oil (Payne, 2015, 35-36). Thus, myriad evidence exists to prove the historic ties between Iran and Oman from ancient times. These can be investigated in different areas such as trade and settlements. Derek Kent has researched the development of territories to the east of Arab countries before the advent of Islam and believes that the Sassanid era was a historic period that impacted the economic history of Arab countries. Michael Morony

discovered artifacts belonging to the Iranian civilization which provide evidence of the development of agricultural methods similar to Fars Province (Payne, 2015, 27-28). Evidence of Sassanid influence can still be seen today in areas controlled by Arab countries, such as the urban structure of al-Khat which is attributed to the period of Ardashir's rule (Potts, 1990, 232-234). Another proof of relations between Iran and Oman based on Wilkinson's theory is the construction of qanats and the use of underground water in Oman in the 6th century CE. He believes that many oases and green spaces in Oman could not have existed without the qanat water channels. Hence, these must have been developed before the 7th century. Another very important factor was trade in Batinah Port in Oman and the Indian Ocean trade routes. Wilkinson attributes the flourishing commercial era to the time of Anushirvan who is known for his policies of development. Also based on evidence, Iranian rulers generally controlled the coastal areas, and the Arab rulers governed over the deserts and mountains (Al-Salimi, Gaube & Korn). Of course, for the qanats to be developed a strong central government was required which, according to al-Bakri, was officially Zoroastrian. At the time, the ruler of Oman was called Abu al-Faraj. He was the first person to transfer water from the mountain into the city (Al-Salimi, Gaube & Korn, 2013, 65-67). The irrigation system used in Oman was known as falaj (or aflaj), which is a changed version of al-Faraj over time. This irrigation system dates back to 500 BCE and can be found in areas such as Dakhiliyah, Sharqiyah, and Batinah regions. Called "kariz" in Iran, it dates back to 5000 years ago in this country. In Oman, falaj was constructed with waterproofed mortar (ibid., 71-73). The mortar was originally used in Iran, increasingly strengthening the theory of the Sassanid influence on the infrastructural affairs of Oman.

Analysis

A great deal of evidence is also available on the architectures of Iran and Oman having many similarities in terms of their physical characteristics, building materials, and even their fundamental design. By investigating the historic and contemporary buildings of Oman in cities such as Muscat, Nizwa, and Muttrah and comparing them with those in areas with a similar climate in Iran, such as Bushehr and Kerman, the opportunity arises to find the connections between the architecture, culture, and history of the two countries. Analyzing the architectural elements reveals that the cross-cultural landscape between the two was generally based on similar values. The similarities are very close together and every factor can occasionally affect another. For instance, the overlapping histories of Iran and Oman during different periods can be an indicator of why the same shapes dominate their architecture. Some of

Fig. 1. The Map of Iran in Sasanid Period. Source: Britannica, 2023.

the edifices, such as forts, mosques, and houses (old and new) have similar patterns of construction and Islamic beliefs as a common religion have affected the emergence of common lifestyles in communities. Geographical and climatic conditions in some regions also show that to respond to the requirements of their natural environment, people have erected buildings that are very similar in structure. This is particularly visible in rural areas (Figs. 2 & 3). In an initial investigation, simplicity and symmetry come to the fore as some of the main indicators of Iranian and Omani architectures which can be seen in various elements. One of these is the iwan. The iwan was initially used in the Parthian style of architecture. Following the construction of mosques with a shabestan, the iwan became the main element of Islamic architecture in mosques. This structure is abundantly seen in Iranian and Omani architectures (Fig. 4).

Building materials are also a defining factor in architecture. Natural materials are usually obtained from the same environment. Therefore, in the cross-cultural landscape of regions with similar environments, similar structures

and forms accepted by both cultures can emerge by relying on the use of similar materials. The main material used in Iranian and Omani architecture in the past which played this role is dried mud brick. The dry-hot and humid-hot architecture in Oman and southern parts of Iran has meant that dried mud bricks and certain other materials such as wood were abundantly used. This has created many similarities in the landscape of both countries and people from both cultures have a sense of proximity when they come face-to-face with adobe constructions. Some examples of these include the Bam Citadel in Iran and the forts of Nizwa and Bahla in Oman (Fig. 5).

In contemporary Omani architecture, models can also be seen which refer to history and culture while updating their original structures. For instance, in many contemporary works of Oman, the principles of axes, symmetry, emphasis on straight extensions, and domes are seen which are not only visible in the 3-D forms of buildings, but are also observed in urban façades and standards. The building of High Court in Oman (Fig. 6) is an important state building where these features are

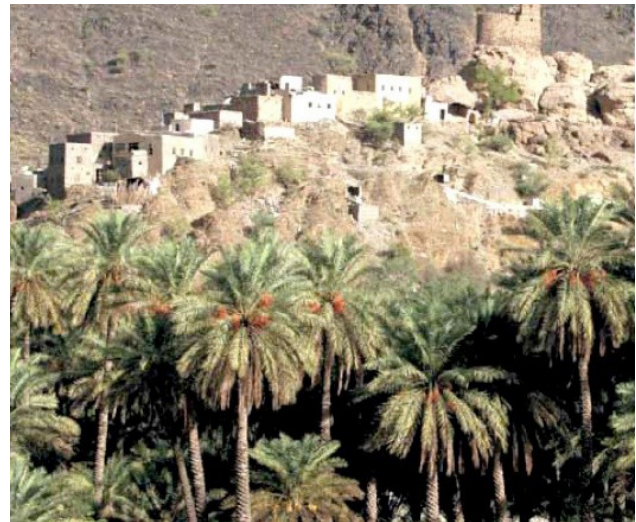Fig. 2. Nayband Village in Iran. Source: Rainer, 1977.

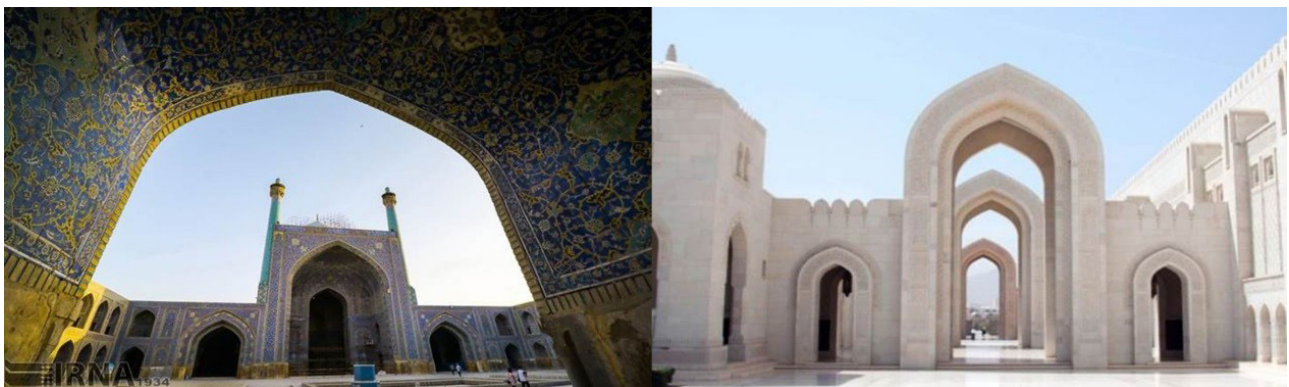Fig. 3. Birkat Al Mouz Village in Oman. Source: Buerkert, 2010.

Fig. 4. Left: Iwan Leading to the Imam Mosque in Isfahan & Right: the Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Oman. Source: Authors archive.
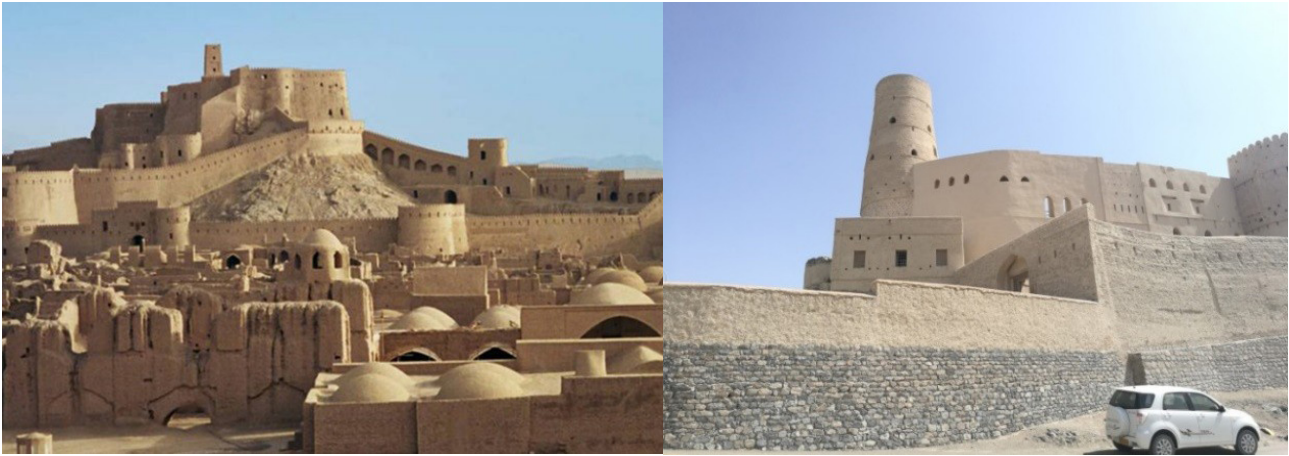
Fig. 5. Similarity of Adobe Structures in Iran & Oman, Right: Bahla Fort. Sources: Authors archive, Left: Bam Citadel. Source: www.caio.ir.

Fig. 6. The High Court Building in Muscat. Source: Authors archive.

Fig. 7. Side Entrance of Muttrah Bazaar, Oman. Source: Authors archive.

clearly seen. Figure 7 also shows a side entrance to the bazaar in Muttrah. This style of architecture is inspired by the traditional architecture of Oman, the like of which can also be found in Iran. Many other factors, such as the symbolic presence of water and openings, are seen in the architecture of both countries and can be named as their similarities.

Conclusion

Based on available evidence, the main factors in identifying the common historical and cultural elements of Iran and Oman include their history, culture, historical buildings, religion, lifestyle, geography, climatic conditions, and historic ruins. How these communicate together creates their cross-cultural platform. Hence, various factors are available to prove the theory that the architecture and landscape of Iran and Oman are very close in identity, making it possible to establish a cross-cultural framework between the two. The way how the history and culture of every country have impacted its architecture can be examined from different aspects. The exact cognition of the architectural identity and the effects of culture on it can help us obtain the specific architectural models and structures of a culture to present a framework for an adaptive structure with another country and analyze the body of architecture in both cultures. The architectural landscape of Iran and Oman has been summarized in the Table 1.

In comparing the said components in Table 1, we can see the common landscape identifiers affected by Iranian and Omani cultures. Although these may crystallize as different forms and spaces, they have always impacted the architectural essence and lifestyles of the people of both countries. These common identifiers introduce principles to us which will be the first criteria in shaping a cross-cultural framework. This is shown as a diagram in Figure 8. In the meantime, exploiting joint cultural values, using mechanisms that have been influenced by compatible cultures to shape the architectural landscape, using similar local building materials in both countries, referring to the common symbols and models of both cultures by relying on religious structures and beliefs,

and avoiding emphasis on anti-value structures, are all opportunities to explore the cross-cultural landscape. Of course, to eliminate the challenges ahead, the focus must also be placed on independent cultural components in a balanced way so as to avoid cliché architectural and landscape models and shun anti-value structures such as the offerings of technology and domination of capitalism as far as possible.

Table 1. Comparing Iranian & Omani Landscapes. Source: Authors.

| Components of the Iranian landscape	Components of the Omani landscape
- Focus on the symmetry of form & balance of structure - Rectangular geometry of the Persian Garden with emphasis on epic & aristocratic aesthetics holding a type of power & perfection - Symbolic view of elements such as water & vegetation - Focus on the senses in using various elements - Focus on sunlight & importance of shade - Transfer of water from one point to another - Focus on the healing & spiritual powers of the garden - Centrality of interaction with nature while moving on the path - Detailed look at the user & selectivity from the observer's perspective - The garden as a paradise - Creating microclimates due to harsh climatic conditions - Importance of "frame" in selecting garden views	- Forming landscapes with a focus on climate adaptation - Symmetry with emphasis on right angles - Rectangular shape in architecture & landscape throughout history with emphasis on uninterrupted views - Using different shades on pathways - Presence of water despite high environmental humidity - Symbolic view of natural elements - Significance of green spaces in local & urban structures - Structuring spaces using shallow waters - Using wood & mud brick materials in ancient architecture; using materials with homogeneous texture in contemporary architecture - Light & white colors - Low-height buildings observing mountains in the background
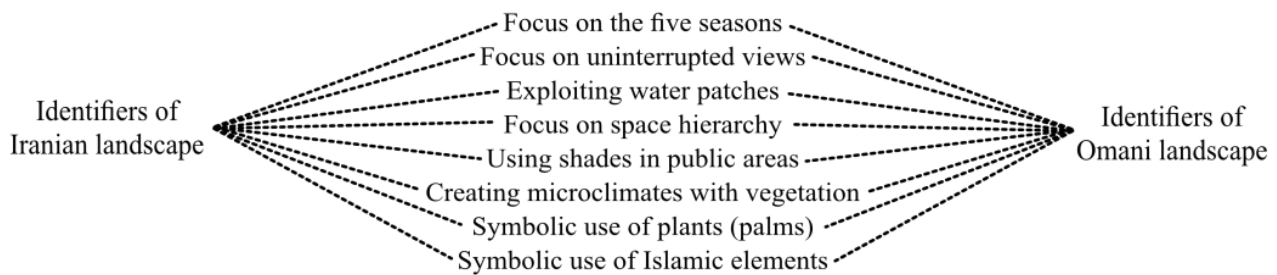
Fig. 8. Common Identifiers of Iranian & Omani Cultural Influence. Source: Authors.

Endnote

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