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## A FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING NEW GARDEN IDENTITIES

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### ABSTRACT

Gardens are created by people based on their needs, culture, and philosophy. They possess specific individual features or identities shaped through time, depending on people's tastes and preferences as well as the surrounding environment. However, developing gardens do not own specific and distinct identities to distinguish them. In fact, even the visual quality and contents of these emerging gardens are not yet clear and continue to evolve over time. Nevertheless, these gardens like established ones need their own identities, which should be based on local people's needs, cultures, philosophy, and preferences. In developing identity for a new garden the reverse could be the case, i.e. the existing gardens can be studied to illicit a general model. In this regard, this study proposes a working model that could contribute to the development of new garden identities. Accordingly, it is argued that the model would be applicable to all communities interested to create their gardens with specific identity.

**Keywords:** *identity, garden development, working model*

### INTRODUCTION

Gardens are not just mere places created by human, but are richly imbued by meanings and symbolism depicting both the present and past events. History and culture have had their impact on the formation and evolution of garden identity (Thacker, 1979). Thus, each garden throughout history acquires its own identity shaped by past events, beliefs, needs, and the culture of people who have created it (Helmreich, 2002; Siciliano, 2005; Tigner, 2004). The identity of a garden plays a significant role in the landscape identity of a country and contributes to national identity (Clayton, 2007; Gross & Lane, 2007). Garden identity also helps binding people and is a source of pride for a nation (Helmreich, 2002). This can be seen in well established gardens of the world such as Persian, Islamic, English, Chinese, and Japanese gardens. Therefore, the development of garden identity is important for countries lacking a nationally and culturally rich representative model for gardens. The question arising is how to develop identity for these gardens. This paper aims to argue and suggest a framework for the development of identity for newly established gardens. The framework is based on the review of garden identity development in selected well established gardens of the world (Persian, Islamic, English, Chinese, and Japanese gardens). Accordingly, this model could be utilized by developing nations in need of exploring and enriching their own garden identities.

### DEFINITIONS OF GARDENS

Garden, as a designed nature, is in fact a combination and collaboration of nature and art (Hobhouse, 2002; McIntosh, 2005). As Brown (1999) asserts, gardens are established based on the needs, economy, and lifestyle of the society. According to Gross & Lane (2007), they express the taste and preferences of a community presented through forms. In other words, gardens are ideal forms of creating place identity (Hunt, 2000). However,

as Clayton (2007) affirms, gardens are taken for granted whenever people do not appreciate them.

To Brace (1999), garden provides spaces and forms to exhibit symbolic nature. Community can share gardens (Pudup, 2008), and garden conveys the personality of its creator in addition to the history of garden culture (Olonetzky, 2007). Thacker (1979) claims that garden is located at the crossroad of nature and culture. This idea is further supported by Ross (1998), Nakagawara (2004), McIntosh (2005), Siciliano (2005), and Clayton (2007). Moreover, as Carroll (2003) believes, garden is connected with the values of people. Siciliano (2005) also recognizes garden as a language, in relationship with nature without word. Likewise, McIntosh (2005) elaborates on the symbolic language of gardens asserting that they cannot be considered as a text with a permanent meaning, i.e. they are subject to change over time. According to Ross (1998), gardens delight the senses, feelings and imagination. Furthermore, Gross & Lane (2007) state that garden is a presentation of emotion, meaning and history via an experience of natural settings.

Based on the argument, garden refers to an ideal form arising from a combination of nature and art. It presents specific needs, emotions, symbols, cultures, history, and stories in a visual setting. Accordingly, in this study, garden can be defined as an artistically designed place, with specific icons emerged from culture and influenced by particular social relationships.

#### Key Issues Affecting Garden Identity Development

As an artistic form, garden conveys the personality of the people who created it. It is established through symbols, meanings and practices, which are based on culture as well as social relationships (Miller, 1993; Escobar, 2001; Stephenson, 2008; Olonetzky, 2007). Well-established gardens can provide examples for new developing gardens. Consequently, the history, design principles, process of identity development and specific garden elements in Persian, English, Chinese and Japanese gardens were reviewed. These gardens were selected due to their distinctive identities and uniqueness as well established gardens of the world. This approach identified the main issues in garden development and particular elements that reflect garden identity.

#### Community Identity

Eriksen (1999) discusses about globalization transforming the world into a uniform and monotonous place. Globalization as a phenomenon creates the need for rethinking and enhancing unique local characteristics, which place emphasis on developing identities in languages, religions, cultures, environments, traditions and art (Eriksen, 1999; Pujol, 2001). Waymark (2003) emphasizes garden as a symbol of national identity, which can be a device reflecting the sense of community identity and locality. Hence, community identity could be enhanced by the development of garden identity. Stephenson (2008) categorizes community identity into sense of history and sense of belonging. Siciliano (2005) argues that, in creating a garden, the attention should be paid to the past traditions affecting design. Furthermore, Benes (1999) mentions that garden design should afford connection with historical backgrounds. Consequently, establishing garden identity could project the sense of history concerning historical events in design principles and provide sense of belonging for the nation and community.

## Cultural Influences

Culture is an issue, which has a significant effect on the development of garden identity. Stephenson (2007) defines cultural values as those shared by a group. Cultural identity is strongly associated with the ways in which people interact with their environment. It refers to myths, stories, meanings, memories and histories of a nation (Stephenson, 2008). As discussed earlier, these principles are taken into consideration in historical gardens, particularly the selected gardens of the present study. Different societies are distinguished from each other through cultural diversities. Culture is not a style; it is a truth by itself (Aziz & Osman, 2007). Therefore, culture can be reflected in garden as a way to represent people and their specific history.

As elaborated above, specific myths, stories and history were employed in creating Persian gardens (Khansari, Moghtader, & Yavari, 2004). The influence of these specific aspects of culture such as particular meanings of the nature is also discernible in Chinese gardens. Furthermore, Japanese gardens have their roots in the stories still narrated; the custom of drinking wine at the time of blossom viewing is even popular in Japanese gardens nowadays (Thacker, 1979). Alike, according to Helmreich (2002), English gardens have been developed with attention to cultural aspects presenting national identity.

## Philosophy of Garden Design

Philosophy could be emphasized as one of the most important issues in establishing garden identity (Aziz & Osman, 2007). According to Thacker (1979), philosophy is the basis of developing Chinese garden identity. Since Chinese garden is associated with nature, philosophy is summarized as *shan shui*, or "mountains" and "water." In addition, religion - as a subcontract of philosophy - plays a significant role in the emergence of garden identity, as do spirituality and belief. Hamed (1994), claims that the elements of certain gardens are echoes of the religion and philosophy of the people who have created them. Nakagawara (2004) recognizes the influence of spirituality and religion on the development of Japanese gardens. In addition, McIntosh (2005) asserts that the association between religious beliefs and philosophy is clear in English gardens. The gardens associated with the church display statues of the saints and Virgin Mary, whereas private gardens include statues of roman goddesses. Therefore, establishing new garden identity for a particular nation should be according to their specific philosophy and a reflection of their spirituality, beliefs and religion.

## Nature and Garden Development

Nature could be recognized as another important issue in establishing garden identity. Special ecology processes, vegetations and climate have been responsible for differences in historical gardens. Chinese gardens display the nature in symbolic form, which may not be very realistic but aspires to find the nature of nature (Thacker, 1979). Rocks and their special meanings and usages in Chinese and Japanese gardens as well as making use of grovels, sands and exclusive use of water in Persian gardens obviously claim the importance of nature in the development of garden identity. Moreover, certain vegetation of garden is one of the factors assisting the recognition of garden identity. Parallel cases of roses in English gardens, orchids in Chinese gardens, cedar in Persian gardens and cherry blossoms of Japanese gardens bear evidence to such a claim (Thacker, 1979; King, 1979; Goode & Lancaster, 1986; Khansari et.al, 2004). Climate also has effect on garden vegetation as well as changing features in different seasons.

## Architecture and Formation of Garden Identity

Another important aspect in establishing garden identity is architecture. Garden design is originally a traditional art form, which has derived from and evolved along with art and architecture (King, 1979; Miller, 1993; Ross, 1998; Waymark, 2003). Strong association between garden identity and architecture is visible in selected gardens of the present study. Slawson (1987) identifies architecture as the bone of English gardens. Concerning Thacker's (1979) descriptions of historical gardens, unique form of domes above pools in Persian gardens, special forms of pagodas in Chinese gardens as well as pavilions and different types of bridges in historical gardens are enough proofs for this claim. Therefore, special style of architecture and its association with developing garden identity could be a factor in establishing such an identity.

## The Influence of Technology in Garden Design

Early man improved his environment with basic materials such as stone, timber, mud or even plants to fill the vast yet untouched space around him. With the development of technology, new materials are produced, giving man more choices in creating and designing spaces (Aziz & Osman, 2007). Moreover, technology and the power of steam engines in naturalizing gardens of 19th century have been reported in a study by Wise and Wise (2002). They mention new technology and science as important aspects in reforming gardens (Wise & Wise, 2002). Nowadays, new technology gives this opportunity to designers to create different spaces. In addition, people activities have changed by the development of technology, which should be considered in developing new garden identity. Spaces must be acceptable and usable for the new generation with their various types of activities. Obviously, human activities in the twenty-first century are quite different from those in the sixteenth century. Even materials used in irrigation methods as well as the ones used in maintenance are different from the past. These factors must be paid due attention in developing new garden identity according to the needs and demands of life in the age of technology (Figure 1).

In line with the preceding arguments and with attention to the process of identity development in the selected gardens, key issues that affect the development of garden identity could be recognized as community identity, culture, philosophy, nature, architectural features and technology.

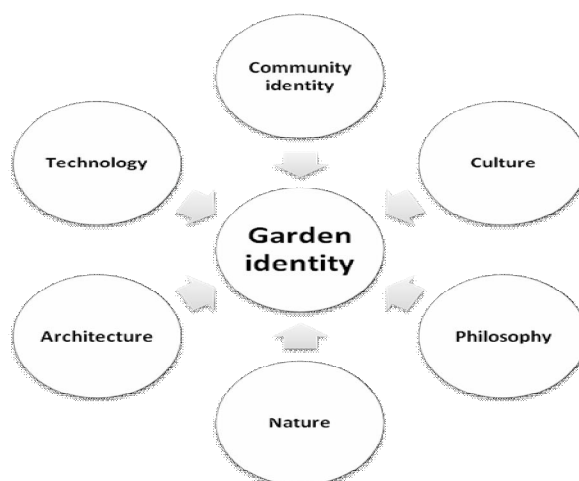


Figure 1: Key Issues Affecting the Development of Garden Identity

The issues could be classified in terms of two main groups of tacit and visual qualities. Tacit qualities are referred to as unseen and inherent qualities such as community identity, culture, and philosophy. Based on this classification, nature, architectural features and technology are recognized as visual qualities, which also embody tacit qualities. In fact, the visual appearance of architecture, nature and technology depends on people, their culture, and philosophy in creating and presenting identity.

#### Influence of the Selected Gardens Elements on Garden Identity

According to McIntosh (2005), garden elements symbolically present materials such as earth, water, air, and fire. Water is most represented in the form of lakes and fountains, earth appears as soil and rocks, air (breeze) blows through the garden, and fire is depicted through sunshine and warmth. There are several symbolic meanings behind the elements of the selected well established gardens.

In Persian gardens, water is the most important element and is always displayed in the form of streams and pools (Lehrman, 1980; Khansari et.al, 2004; Hobhouse & Hunningher, 2004; Faghih, 2005; Jawaherian, 2005). In addition, architectural and decorative features are important elements in the development and identity formation of Persian gardens (Porter & Theven, 2003; Khansari et.al, 2004; Omrani & Jeyhani, 2005). It can be concluded that crossing water, straight pathways, rows of flowers and trees, pavilions in central position, enclosing walls in addition to geometric decorations and water features are the specific elements of Persian gardens.

English gardens consist of natural, manmade, and architectural features (McIntosh, 2005; Siciliano, 2005). Long avenues, triumphal arch, valley, temples, ponds, lakes, statues, and allegorical features appearing in pools are the specific elements of English gardens (Hobhouse, 2002; Olonetzky, 2007). Benches, fences, pavilions, terraces, plunge pool or bath, lawns and flowerbeds are among other characteristic elements of English gardens as well (Goode & Lancaster, 1986; Brown, 1999; Taylor, 2000; Hobhouse, 2002). Compartment, known as room and identified as a shelter in formal gardens is another element of English gardens (Buchan, 2006).

Chinese gardens, on the other hand, employ different elements such as hills, ponds, cliffs, pavilions, trees, flowers, and plants (Engle, 1986; Dongchu, 1991; Valder, 2002; McIntoch, 2005). Rocks have been the key elements in creating Chinese gardens and water has been the most satisfying feature (Thacker, 1979; Valder, 2002; McIntoch, 2005). Moreover, ponds with silver and gold fish, artificial rocks, pavilions, latticed windows, moon gates, bridges, and zigzag pathways are significant elements in Chinese gardens (Engle, 1986; Dongchu, 1991; Keswick, Hardie, & Jenks, 2003; Stokman & Ruff, 2005).

Regarding Japanese gardens, a few earth materials such as stone, water, bamboo, wood and plants are among the employed features (Slawson, 1987; Tschumi, 2005; McIntosh, 2005). Rocks and trees are the two basic elements, and ponds with islands are illustrations of sea in garden (Main & Platten, 2002; Nakagawara, 2004). Sand is also employed as under-controlled water, and bridges are designed to provide access to the islands and cross the streams. Structures are important, with walls providing privacy (Young & Young, 2005). Furthermore, architectural features such as water basins, teahouses, bedding stones, paths, lanterns, water streams, waterfalls, artificial hills and shrubs are recognized as specific elements of Japanese gardens.

There is a significant meaning for rocks and stones in Chinese and Japanese gardens. They have long been considered as dwelling place of gods, signs of power, symbols of immortality and aspirations of wisdom. Sometimes, garden elements are considered as sacred and are associated with gods and goddesses. For instance, plants provide symbolical meanings in many cultures and are selected according to their specific, mythical or religious associations with cultural beliefs. As a source of life and a basic element conveying rhythm, water is generally considered as a sacred element in Persian gardens. Accordingly, the main garden elements can be identified as water features, architectural features, plants, rock and stones, decorative features, pathways and sand.

#### THEORY OF GARDEN DESIGN AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW GARDEN IDENTITY

Miller (1993) suggests three main principles for creating a garden. Accordingly, garden should face the sky, include natural elements, and present a form with significance and meaning. Moreover, Turner (2005), argues that the theory of garden design should answer the questions of 'what, where, why, how, when and who' for creating gardens. He discusses the aesthetic values that should be considered in the creation of gardens. Hence, paying attention to this theory, the key issues in garden development, and the theory of garden design; it can be concluded that a garden is an aesthetically designed nature with certain elements and specific significance. It should present people's needs paralleled with cultural values, philosophy identity, and history.

Based on the aforementioned theory and taking account of the identity development process in the selected gardens, it is argued that gardens are established by people and affected by their particular cultures. Therefore, a circular inter-relationship between garden identity, people and their specific culture, and tacit and visual qualities of gardens can be proposed as the basis for the development of new garden identities (Figure 2).

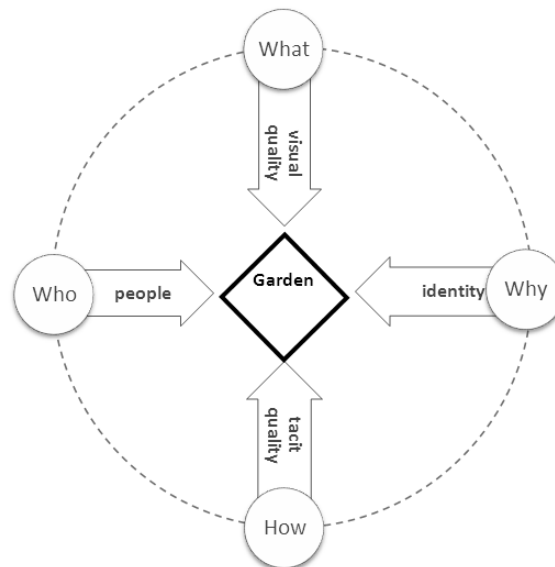


Figure 2: Development of Garden Identity with Attention to the Theory of Garden Design

According to the figure above, garden identity is developed to answer the question of why each nation creates specific gardens. The selected gardens of the study evolved an identity to celebrate their power, identity, culture, and philosophy. In this relation, visual

quality of a garden displays garden identity and indicates 'what' is inside a garden. It is capable of discussing the 'what' for both established and new developing gardens and refers to the garden elements as identified above. Addressing the question 'who,' people are identified as garden users. Finally, tacit qualities influences on 'how' garden should be designed. Obviously, the key issues that affect garden identity development are considered in this relation.

### People and the Development of New Garden Identity

Helmreich (2002) suggests that cultural values and social relationships are equally important aspects in recognizing garden as a representative of national identity. Furthermore, Gross and Lane (2007) argue that people and their value system and identity directly influence garden identity. A garden mirrors the culture of its people, and the cultural aspects of gardens are important in transferring ideas and traditions via garden designs (Engle, 1989; Benes, 1999; Helmreich, 2002; Tigner, 2004; Johnston, 2005). It can be concluded that people of diverse cultural backgrounds may have different preferences for gardens, which should be considered in the development of new garden identities.

### People Preferences of New Gardens



Figure 3: People Preferences and the Creation of a New Garden Identity

### Visual quality of a New Garden

Well established gardens such as the selected gardens of this study, have their own recognizable visual qualities in the form of shapes and forms. The existing visual qualities display garden identities and can be discerned via representative images of a garden. These qualities which represent identities are termed garden iconography. In fact, iconography is defined as the representation or collection of representatives of a person, place or thing, as a portrait or collection of portraits (Collins English Dictionary, 2009). Consequently, garden iconography includes collection of garden images, which represent an identity and specific culture. As such, it contributes to the formation and creation of an international visual language artistically employed to express various ideas about gardens.

Once the relationship between garden identity, visual, and tacit quality of garden, and people are taken into consideration (Figure 2), new developing gardens can establish their identities based on people, their cultures and preferences. In fact, these icons or representative images of developing gardens should be those that are preferred and accepted by people and their unique culture. A simplified model in Figure 4 illustrates this process by people and through time.

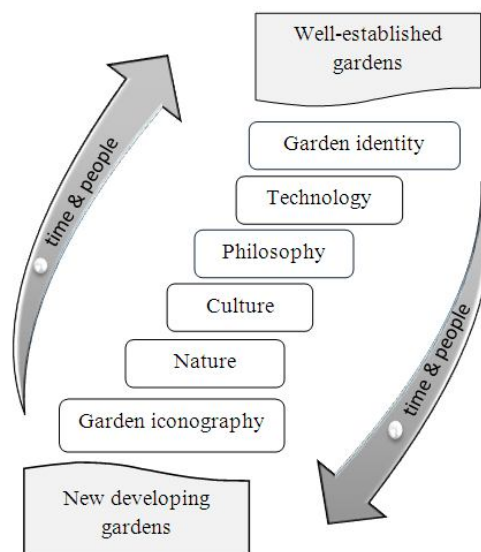


Figure 4: The Process of Garden Iconography and Identity Development

As presented in Figure 4, well established gardens have already built their identity using available technology and according to the philosophy and culture of people. These gardens have been compatible with nature and displayed their unique iconographies through time. New developing gardens should employ the reverse path. Indeed, people and their preferences could assist in suggesting the main guidelines for visual appearance of new gardens namely their iconographies. Then, by paying attention to the nature, culture and philosophy of people and employing the available technology, new garden identities could be shaped and enhanced through time.

#### PROPOSING A WORKING MODEL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW GARDEN IDENTITY

Gardens have been considered as artistic phenomena, in a long lasting relation with the other branches of art. They provide distinctive visual qualities displayed in their images and can be studied and identified, like other pictorial phenomena, through an iconographic method. The new developing gardens should be accepted and appreciated by people as active users. Therefore, gardens should present their images with such a quality that can be appreciated by people. It should correspond with their specific needs and preferences.

With regards to the development of a new garden identity, the attention should be on people and their preferences. The preferred iconography can provide general guidelines to design and create new gardens. Artistic aspects, natural potential, culture, philosophy, and technology should also be considered at the next stages of the design and development of new garden identities.



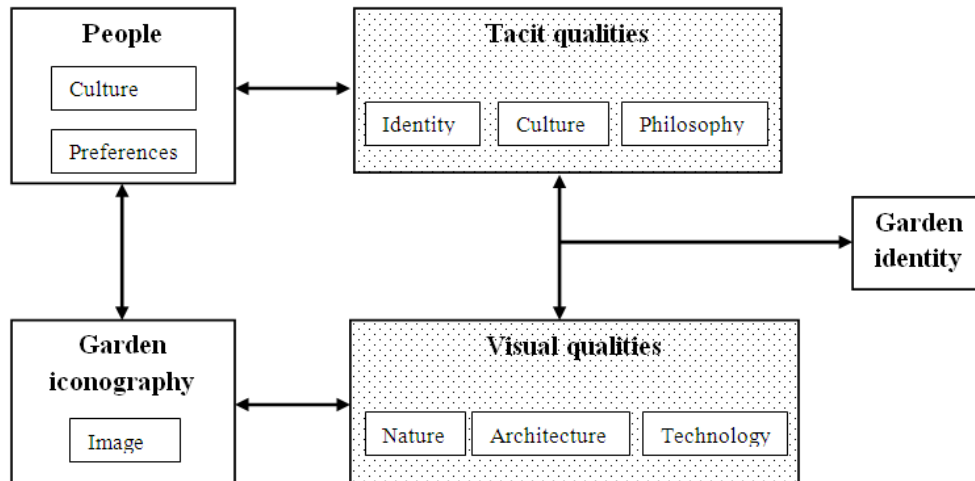


Figure 5: A Model for the Development of New Garden Identity

The framework simplifies the process by which new developing gardens can create their iconography and identity. As discussed, tacit and visual qualities influence the development of garden identities. It is also concluded that tacit qualities should be considered in creating new garden identities or suggesting images that can present a new garden iconography. Therefore, tacit qualities influence the formation of visual qualities.

On the other hand, cultural differences, content of scenes, and their organizations influence people's preferences. In fact, both tacit and visual qualities effecting garden developments influence people's preferences as well. Previous studies by Zube (1981), Kaplan & Talbot (1998), Yang and Kaplan (1990), Stamps and Nasar (1979) and Yu (1995) recognize culture as an affective factor on people's preferences. Cultural differences may rise due to background differences such as religion, tradition and living conditions.

It can be thereby concluded that the preferred iconography for a garden identifies the images presenting preferred garden type, elements and arrangement. In fact, at this stage, people identify the preferred visual quality of new garden. Their selection is affected by their cultural backgrounds, which also influence tacit qualities. Then, the preferred images, which present the preferred iconography, are analyzed in terms of content and spatial organizations. This approach reveals the visual qualities necessary to be included in the iconography of new developing garden.

The next stage identifies tacit qualities that may influence garden features. Obviously, the tacit qualities such as community identity, culture and philosophy influence the formation of visual elements of gardens. In addition, nature with a direct influence in terms of climate and vegetation is considered in the design of new garden. Moreover, architecture influenced by symbolic ideology and aesthetic beauty is employed to provide the sense of place for new gardens. Climate, culture, philosophical aspects and technology also influence architecture. Eventually, technology itself has an impact on the materials and ways to construct gardens.

## CONCLUSION

This paper proposed a framework for identity development of new gardens based on the identity development of well established gardens. It identified the key issues in garden development and specific garden elements that reflect formation and recognition of garden identities. Consequently, it concluded that preferences for visual quality or iconography of a new garden should be explored. The analysis of preferred images of well established gardens could identify visual qualities for a new developing garden. The findings regarding preferred images could be used in the development of design principles for new garden. Moreover, communal identity, culture and philosophy of people as garden users have to be considered in providing guidelines for the design and creation of preferred gardens with specific identity. Consequently, new gardens could be designed based on both tacit and preferred visual qualities suggested by the framework.

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