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Original Research Article

A Proposed Model for the World Heritage Nomination of Historic Gardens Based on a Comparative Analysis of UNESCO-Inscribed Dossiers

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ABSTRACT

The Persian Garden, as one of the oldest examples of cultural landscapes in the world, represents a sophisticated synthesis of intelligent geometry, complex water-engineering systems, deep cultural layers, and advanced adaptation to Iran's diverse climatic conditions. Despite the existence of general guidelines in UNESCO documents, the preparation of World Heritage nomination dossiers for Iran's historic gardens continues to face significant challenges, including inconsistencies in documentation, weaknesses in the articulation of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), the absence of a coherent management framework, uneven levels of protection among gardens, and increasing environmental and urban pressures. Adopting a qualitative research approach based on documentary analysis, comparative analysis, and thematic analysis, this study examines the official World Heritage nomination dossier of the nine Persian gardens alongside the ICOMOS evaluation report (2011) to identify shared success patterns and the underlying causes of nomination challenges. The findings reveal that the core factors contributing to the successful inscription of Persian gardens are rooted in four fundamental pillars: (1) precise documentation of water systems, geometry, and spatial structure; (2) clear analysis and justification of cultural criteria C(i)–C(vi); (3) recognition of the relationship between the garden, the urban context, and the broader territorial landscape; and (4) the provision of an integrated management and conservation plan. Based on these findings, the present research proposes a context-specific and operational model for the preparation of nomination dossiers capable of bridging the gap between UNESCO's general guidelines and the specific conditions of Persian historic gardens. By standardizing documentation, strengthening OUV argumentation, integrating ecological and historical knowledge, and proposing a coherent management framework, this model enhances the efficiency of preparing new World Heritage nomination dossiers and increases the likelihood of successful inscription for Iran's historic properties. Drawing on the practical experience of the nine inscribed Persian gardens, this study offers a coherent framework that constitutes an effective step toward improving the processes of conservation, management, and World Heritage inscription of Iran's historic gardens.

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Introduction

"The Iranians' affection for trees, water, and earth gradually evolved into an enduring passion that found its most profound expression in the Persian garden" (Wilber, 1962/1969). Within the global history of garden design, the Persian garden is recognized not merely as a distinctive style of landscape architecture (Mansouri, 2005) but as a multifaceted cultural construct reflecting a wide spectrum of spiritual and symbolic ideals. These include the recreation of the archetypal paradise on earth (Heydar Nattaj & Mansouri, 2009), the sacralization of space (Sheybani & Hashemi Zadegan, 2017), multilayeredsemanticstructures(Etezadi&Bina,2017), the temporal representation of historical identity (HeidarNattaj, 2017), and a profound connection with ritual and cosmological beliefs both before and after the advent of Islam in Iran (Mansouri, 2019). Given their exceptional cultural, historical, and environmental values, the conservation of Persian gardens constitutes an unavoidable and imperative necessity.

The UNESCO World Heritage Convention was adopted on 16 November 1972 with the aim of safeguarding cultural, natural, and historical properties of Outstanding Universal Value that are considered to belong to humanity as a whole (UNESCO, 1972). Under the provisions of this Convention, States Parties are entitled to nominate properties within their territories for inscription on the World Heritage List, while the protection and conservation of inscribed properties become a shared responsibility of the international community. Iran acceded to the World Heritage Convention in 1975 and, to date, ranks ninth worldwide with the inscription of 25 cultural properties and 2 natural properties on the World Heritage List (Iran National Commission for UNESCO, 2016).

The 35th session of the World Heritage Committee, as a unique and outstanding example of cultural landscape design and construction (World Heritage Committee, 2011). This serial nomination includes nine gardens located in different regions of Iran: Pasargadae Garden (Marvdasht), Eram Garden (Shiraz), Shazdeh Garden (Mahan), Chehel Sotoun Garden (Isfahan), Fin Garden (Kashan), Abbas Abad Garden (Behshahr), Dowlat Abad Garden (Yazd), Akbariyeh Garden (Birjand), and Pahlavanpour Garden (Mehriz). Collectively, these gardens represent a wide diversity of design principles, spatial patterns, and adaptive responses to the varied climatic conditions of the country.

The systematic examination of successful experiences, methodologies, and the preparation of required documentation and supporting materials play a crucial role in structuring the processes of conservation and World Heritage nomination for historic gardens, thereby reducing time loss and minimizing the risk of failure in the nomination process. Nevertheless, despite the existence of clearly articulated UNESCO guidelines for the inscription of cultural and natural heritage, these guidelines are inherently general in nature and present significant challenges when applied to the specific conditions of Persian gardens. The historical diversity, architectural characteristics, and socio-cultural functions of gardens in Iran necessitate a precise interpretation and contextualization of UNESCO criteria. Reliance solely on general guidelines is therefore insufficient to meet the practical needs of nomination applicants.

Furthermore, core UNESCO concepts and evaluation frameworkssuch as Outstanding Universal Value Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), authenticity, and integritycannot, in the absence of comparative analysis and empirical case-based evidence, provide an operational framework for the preparation of nomination dossiers for Persian historic gardens (Fig. 1).

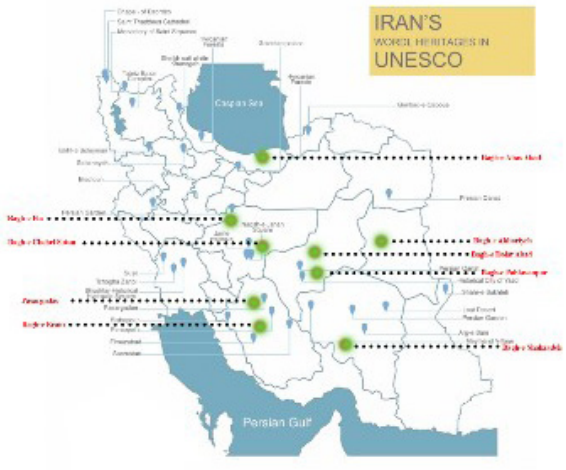


Fig. 1. Geographic location of the nominated Persian Gardens. Source: World Heritage Committee, 2011.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach grounded in documentary analysis. In the first stage, UNESCO guidelines, cultural criteria, and official reports related to the World Heritage nomination of historic gardens were systematically reviewed and analyzed. Subsequently, complementary sources were examined based on three principal axes:

(a) Analysis of UNESCO's approach toward Iranian historic gardens through the examination of nomination dossiers, heritage evaluation reports, and documents related to cultural values and Outstanding Universal Value;

(b) review of historical documentation of the inscribed gardens, including scholarly texts, archival records, and historical maps, to re-examine the evolutionary processes of the gardens and their physical, spatial, and climatic components; and

(c) Analysis of reports and decisions concerning the assessment of World Heritage cultural criteria and the nomination process of the nine Persian Gardens included in Nomination File 1372 (Fig. 2).

The collected data were categorized using comparative analysis and thematic analysis to identify

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shared patterns, influential criteria, and the strengths and weaknesses of the nomination dossiers. This analytical process ultimately led to the formulation of a proposed model for the preparation of World Heritage nomination dossiers for historic gardens in Iran.

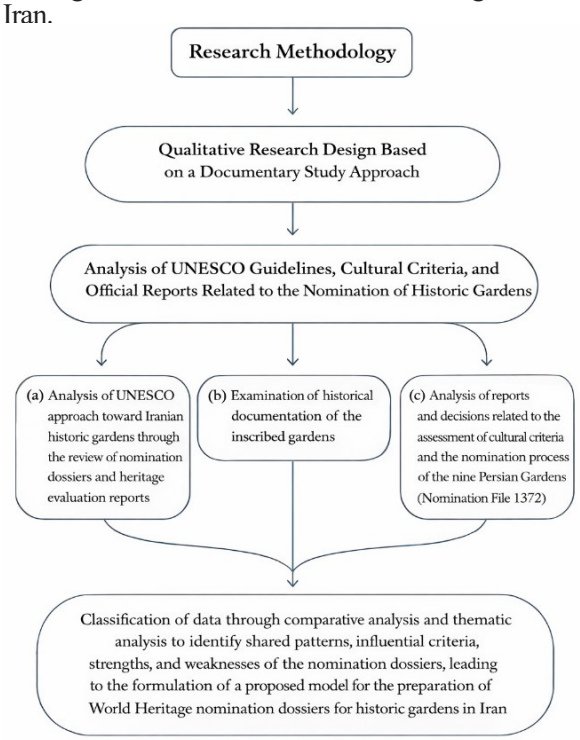


Fig. 2. Research methodology framework of the study. Source: Authors.

Literature Review

UNESCO defines historic monuments and heritage as follows: "Our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations; our natural and cultural heritage are irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration" (Akagawa & Sirisrisak, 2008). On this basis, the 1972 World Heritage Convention was formulated with the objective of identifying, safeguarding, and inscribing cultural and natural properties of Outstanding Universal Value (Bemanian et al., 2010).

According to the UNESCO World Heritage List, inscribed properties are classified within five geographic regions: Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2006, the World Heritage List comprised 830 properties, of which 644 were cultural properties, and 162 were natural properties (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2007). The Persian Gardens, inscribed in 2011, are classified within this framework under the category of Cultural Properties.

Numerous national studies on Persian gardens have predominantly focused on the identification and description of the physical and landscape characteristics of the nine World Heritage–inscribed gardens, providing valuable insights into their historical structure, garden geometry, vegetation cover, and water management systems. The most significant of these studies are summarized in the Table 1.

Despite the scholarly value of these national studies, the review of the literature indicates that none of them have addressed critical issues such as the mechanisms for preparing World Heritage nomination dossiers, the nomination and inscription process, UNESCO cultural criteria, the assessment of authenticity and integrity, or the management frameworks required for historic gardens. Consequently, the present research seeks to address part of the existing scholarly gap by incorporating and critically engaging with authoritative international sources.

According to UNESCO's UNESCO World Heritage Centre (2017), Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), the cultural criteria (i–vi), and the two core principles

Table 1. Analysis of Reviewed Studies on UNESCO Documentation of Historic Gardens in Iran. Source: Authors.

Type of Research	Title of Study	Authors & Year	Relevance to the Present Study
World Heritage–Inscribed Historic Gardens	Ornamentation as a Threat to Persian Gardens Listed as World Heritage	Khalilnezhad, 2019	Analysis of vegetation cover and ornamental planting patterns in the nine World Heritage–inscribed Persian gardens.
World Heritage–Inscribed Historic Gardens	A Review of the Valuable Heritage of the Persian Garden on the UNESCO World Heritage List	Dehdar, 2018 (Cultural Newspaper: Iran Development)	Introduction of the nine inscribed historic gardens with an emphasis on cultural tourism and visitor guidance
Expert-Based Research	An Inquiry into the Components of Authenticity Recognition in Cultural Heritage Conservation	Fadaei Nezhad & Eshrati , 2015	Examination of the concept of authenticity within cultural landscapes and the significance of community participation
Expert-Based Research	Investigating the Principal Challenges of the Cultural Landscape Concept: A Review and Analysis of Its Eighteen-Year Trajectory within UNESCO	Hanachi & Eshrati, 2011	Analysis of the cultural landscape concept, its criteria and historical development, UNESCO's approach, critical evaluation of its actions, and contradictions in definitions among related organizations
Documentary–Analytical Research	An Examination of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) and the Selection of National Natural Properties of Iran in Relation to the Convention's Criteria for World Heritage Inscription	Dabiri et al., 2014	Introduction to UNESCO, explanation of World Heritage selection criteria, and analysis of the cultural heritage inscription process within the World Heritage Centre

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of authenticity and integrity constitute the primary foundations for the acceptance of a property for inscription on the World Heritage List. Rössler and Saouma-Forero (2001) emphasizes that the successful inscription of cultural landscapes is only achievable when the nomination dossier provides reliable historical documentation, a conservation-oriented management plan, a thorough threat analysis, and a sustainable governance system. Similarly, Fowler (2003), through an examination of both successful and unsuccessful nomination dossiers, identifies deficiencies in documentation, incoherent dossier preparation, and inadequate articulation of OUV as the principal reasons for the rejection of World Heritage nominations.

Akagawa and Sirisrisak (2008) demonstrate that, in the absence of a contextualized and localized operational agenda, Asian and Middle Eastern countries are unable to effectively translate UNESCO's universal criteria into their own cultural and historical contexts. In the ICOMOS evaluation report on the inscription of the Persian Gardens (World Heritage Committee, 2011), the key factors contributing to Iran's successful nomination are identified as the comprehensive documentation of water management systems, garden geometry, integration with cultural history, and the role of gardens in articulating and narrating Iranian identity. For greater coherence, these international sources which also constitute the theoretical foundation of the proposed model presented in this article are summarized in Table 2.

Accordingly, the review of the literature indicates that the existing body of research in Iran is predominantly descriptive in nature and largely confined to the identification and presentation of garden characteristics. In contrast, a rigorous scholarly investigation into the World Heritage nomination process requires a systematic examination of international criteria, management requirements, the structural components of UNESCO nomination dossiers, and the practical experiences of successful countries. The integration of national and international sources thus provides a coherent theoretical framework for analyzing the World Heritage nomination process of historic gardens, and addressing this precise gap constitutes the central objective of the present research.

In the 2011 nomination dossier of the Persian Gardens, the evaluation body (ICOMOS) likewise classified these properties as a combination of designed landscapes and evolved landscapes, on the grounds that the Persian garden is constructed according to principles of geometric design while simultaneously evolving over successive historical periods in response to changing functions, climatic conditions, and cultural contexts (World Heritage Committee, 2011).

Alongside this typology, the Cultural Landscape Foundation and the U.S. National Park Service have also proposed a four-tier classification framework comprising designed landscapes, ethnographic landscapes, historic sites, and vernacular landscapes (Birnbaum, 1994) (Fig. 3).

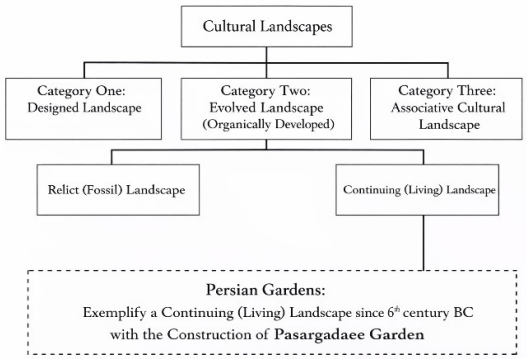


Fig. 3. UNESCO threefold classification of cultural landscapes Source: Authors, adapted from World Heritage Committee, 2011.

World Heritage Selection Criteria

The 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention, and consequently the World Heritage Committee, identify the protection of cultural and natural properties of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) as their principal objective. In 1996, the Committee further emphasized that only those properties whose significance can be demonstrated not merely at the national level, but

Table 2. International Research on World Heritage Inscription Criteria and Nomination Dossier Preparation. Source: Authors.

Study / Document	Author(s) & Year	Main Focus of the Study	Relevance to the Present Research
Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention	UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2017	Cultural criteria, Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), authenticity, and integrity	Identification of the core criteria for the preparation of World Heritage nomination dossiers
Cultural Landscapes: Challenges of Conservation	Rössler & Saouma-Forero, 2001	Management requirements, documentation standards, and threat assessment	Clarification of UNESCO standards for the conservation and nomination of cultural landscapes
Cultural Landscape: A Great Concept	Fowler, 2003	Factors leading to the acceptance or rejection of nomination dossiers	Reducing the risk of dossier rejection through informed preparation
Cultural Landscapes in Asia and the Pacific	Akagawa & Sirisrisak, 2008	Challenges faced by Eastern countries and the localization of global criteria	Formulation of a contextualized agenda for the nomination of Persian gardens
Evaluation Report of the Persian Garden	World Heritage Committee, 2011	Analysis of the nomination dossier of the Persian Gardens	Development of an empirical reference for the proposed nomination model

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on a truly global scale, are eligible for inscription on the World Heritage List. Given that the value of a cultural landscape is fundamentally grounded in the criteria and conditions that define its character, the identification, analysis, and evaluation of these criteria play a pivotal role in the formulation of effective conservation, management, and landscape planning strategies (Irani Behbahani et al., 2010).

According to UNESCO's Operational Guidelines, ten criteria comprising six cultural criteria and four natural criteria form the basis for the assessment of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2008). For a property to be eligible for inscription on the World Heritage List, it must satisfy at least one of these criteria. In the present study, in view of the intrinsic nature of Iran's historic gardens, primary emphasis is placed on the identification and analysis of the cultural criteria, which play a decisive role in the successful nomination and inscription of Persian garden dossiers (Table. 3).

Persian Gardens Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List

The Persian garden represents a symbolic manifestation of paradise (pairidaeza), conceived based on the four fundamental elements of sky, earth, water, and vegetation, and structured according to the geometric principles of the chaharbagh layout (Mansouri, 2005). Beyond its functional role, water has consistently served as the principal element in shaping the aesthetic, sensory, and spiritual qualities of Persian gardens (HeydarNattaj & Mansouri, 2009). In 2011, nine historic Persian gardens were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Distributed across different provinces of Iran, each of these gardens represents a distinct phase in the historical evolution of Persian garden design and demonstrates adaptive responses to diverse environmental and cultural conditions. Collectively, this serial property played a significant role in the transmission of Persian garden design principles to various regions of the world, including India, Western Asia, and parts of Europe.

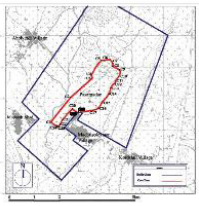
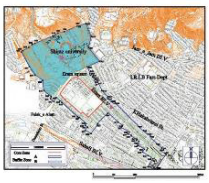
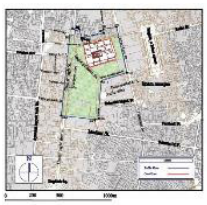
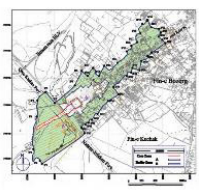
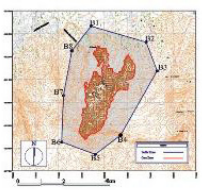
To provide a comprehensive and systematic overview of the characteristics of these gardens, the principal attributes documented in the World Heritage nomination dossiers including historical background, geometric structure, garden function, water supply and irrigation systems, planting schemes and vegetation cover, architectural components, climatic conditions (precipitation and temperature), and the inscribed property boundaries (core and buffer zones) have been compiled in Table 4. This table enables a comparative

Table 3. Cultural and Natural Criteria and the Inscription Framework of UNESCO-Listed Cultural Landscapes. Source: Authors, adapted from UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2017.

Criterion (Cultural / Natural)	Description of the Criterion	Number of Cultural Landscapes	Percentage of Cultural Landscapes (%)
C(i)	To represent a masterpiece of human creative genius.	7	2.69
C(ii)	To exhibit an important interchange of human values over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world.	35	13.46
C(iii)	To bear a unique testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization, living or extinct.	57	21.92
C(iv)	To be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble, or landscape which illustrates significant stages in human history.	60	23.08
C(v)	To be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.	49	18.85
C(vi)	To be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, ideas, beliefs, or artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria).	33	12.69
N(vii)	To contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.	7	2.69
N(viii)	To be outstanding examples representing major stages of Earth's history, including the record of life, significant ongoing geological processes, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features.	5	1.92
N(ix)	To be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, freshwater, coastal, and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals.	4	1.54
N(x)	To contain the most significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.	3	1.15

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Table 4. Overview of UNESCO World Heritage–Inscribed Persian Gardens According to Cultural Criteria. Source: Authors.

Garden Name	Period, Function, and Building Layout	Structure, Water System, Planting System, and Vegetation	Climatic Conditions (Rainfall / Temperature)	UNESCO Cultural Criteria	UNESCO Inscribed Area[1]
Pasargadae	Achaemenid period; governmental–residential function; extroverted pavilion (kushk) with columned portico	Earliest chaharbagh prototype; qanat and canal system; planting within garden plots; cypress, pomegranate, rose, tulip	280 mm; −12 to 40 °C	C(i) Masterpiece of geometry and water engineering; C(ii) Origin of the diffusion of the paradise garden model; C(iii) Testimony to an enduring garden-making tradition; C(iv) Prototype of the Persian garden	
Eram	Ilkhanid–Qajar period; pavilion garden; two garden pavilions	Symmetrical tripartite layout; Nahr-e A'zam watercourse and well; renowned cypress groves; cypress, pine, Judas tree, citrus	231 mm; 2 to 30 °C	C(ii) Interchange of design values in the Islamic world; C(iii) Continuity of garden-making tradition; C(iv) Distinguished garden–pavilion composition	
Chehel Sotoun	Safavid period; royal garden; pavilion located in the upper third of the garden	Square layout with central pavilion; spring and royal water channel; strong visual integration with water; plane tree, elm	197 mm; −2 to 40 °C	C(ii) Influence of the royal garden model; C(iii) Testimony to Iranian ceremonial culture; C(iv) Outstanding example of Safavid pavilion architecture	
Fin Garden (Kashan)	Buyid–Qajar period; garden–fortress; Sarabestan pavilion located in the upper third	Flat terrain; Soleymaniyeh spring; trees aligned along main axes; cypress, juniper (zarbīn), plane tree	120 mm; 5 to 34 °C	C(ii) Continuity of garden-making across multiple historical periods; C(iii) Association with Iranian social traditions; C(iv) Magnificent example of a garden–fortress	
Abbas Abad (Behshahr)	Safavid period; residential–recreational function; central pavilion	Terraced hillside garden; water reservoir; terraced planting system; forested–mountainous vegetation	621 mm; 6.8 to 35 °C	C(v) Sustainable interaction between humans and mountainous nature through water management	
Shazdeh Mahan	Qajar period; recreational garden; pavilion located in the upper third	Sloped terraced garden (bagh-takht); spring and qanat; stepped cascades; axial and terraced tree planting; juniper, plane tree, cypress	77 mm; 8 to 38 °C	C(i) Masterpiece of garden design on a 6% slope; C(v) Precise adaptation to arid climate; C(iv) Complete axial and symmetrical Qajar garden model	
Dowlat Abad	Zand period; pavilion garden; twin pavilions (Kushk and Behesht Ayeen)	Axial bipartite layout; Dowlat Abad qanat; linear planting around plots; grapevine, cypress, pine	59 mm; 4 to 42 °C	C(ii) Interchange of architectural values in the Isfahani style; C(iv) 33-m windcatcher technology combined with an authentic pavilion	

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Rest of Table 4.

Garden Name	Period, Function, and Building Layout	Structure, Water System, Planting System, and Vegetation	Climatic Conditions (Rainfall / Temperature)	UNESCO Cultural Criteria	UNESCO Inscribed Area[1]
Pahlavanpour	Qajar period; pavilion garden; building aligned along watercourse	Linear axial structure; perennial qanat; dense vegetation cover; mature plane trees, pomegranate, almond	61 mm; 2 to 45 °C	C(v) Clear example of a qanat-based garden and human–environment interaction in arid Yazd	
Akbariyeh	Qajar period; garden–pavilion; recreational residence with Qajar buildings at the garden's end	Central pool house; qanat system; native vegetation of Birjand; pine, pomegranate, mulberry	171 mm; −4 to 30 °C	C(ii) Association with architectural traditions of eastern Iran; C(iv) Outstanding example of a Qajar garden–mansion in Birjand	

analytical assessment of the gardens and serves as a basis for identifying shared principles underpinning their World Heritage inscription. Subsequently, drawing upon the information presented in this table, the cultural criteria that led to the inscription of these gardens are analyzed and articulated, thereby providing a foundation for the development of a practical guideline for the nomination of historic gardens in Iran.

• Comparative analysis of UNESCO cultural criteria in the inscribed Persian gardens

The comparative analysis of the nine Persian gardens inscribed on the World Heritage List demonstrates that, while these properties share the fundamental structural principles of the Persian garden such as the longitudinal axis, ordered geometry, the vital role of water, and the presence of the kushk (pavilion) they simultaneously exhibit a remarkable diversity in their adaptation to local climatic and cultural contexts. The gardens extend across a wide range of environmental conditions, from the arid central regions of Iran (such as Dowlat Abad and Shazdeh Mahan) to the humid northern climate (as exemplified by Abbas Abad), indicating that the Persian garden model has, over time, provided a creative, flexible, and sustainable response to diverse environmental settings.

In terms of the assessment of UNESCO cultural criteria, a clear correspondence between the Persian gardens and criteria C(i), C(ii), C(iii), C(iv), and C(v) can be observed. Based on the data presented in Table 5, each garden satisfies a specific combination of these criteria:

• C(i) is manifested in gardens such as Pasargadae, Shazdeh Mahan, and Dowlat Abad through the expression of advanced water engineering, innovative geometric design, and creativity in spatial organization.

• C(ii) is evident in gardens such as Eram, Chehel Sotoun, and Akbariyeh through the transmission of cultural values and the dissemination of the paradise garden model across different regions of the world.

• C(iii) is particularly prominent in gardens such as Fin, Pasargadae, and Chehel Sotoun, owing to the continuity of garden-making traditions and their strong association with Iran's social and ritual culture.

• C(iv) is exemplified in cases such as Chehel Sotoun, Dowlat Abad, and Shazdeh Mahan through the representation of historical technologies and a coherent architectural integration with the natural environment.

• C(v) is clearly reflected in gardens such as Abbas Abad and Pahlavanpour, where the harmonious interaction between humans and the natural environment, intelligent water management, and strong integration with the surrounding landscape are particularly evident.

This diversity in the application of cultural criteria, combined with adherence to a unified Persian garden model, provides a practical framework for the preparation of future World Heritage nomination dossiers. It further demonstrates that the Persian garden should be understood not merely as an architectural artifact, but as a sustainable cultural–ecological system.

• Stages of nominating a garden as a cultural property under UNESCO World Heritage

The inscription of a garden as World Heritage is a multi-stage and standardized process defined by UNESCO. This process comprises five principal stages:

- Preparation of the national proposal

The State Party must include the proposed garden on its Tentative List. At this stage, the following are compiled:

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• A concise identification and description of the property;
• Its historical, cultural, and natural significance; and
• The current state of conservation.

- **Establishment of a national world heritage committee**

The national committee is responsible for the preliminary review of the dossier, completion of UNESCO nomination forms, and the appointment of relevant subject-matter experts.

- **Preparation of the nomination dossier (nomination file)**

This is the most critical stage and typically includes:
• Articulation of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV);
• Identification and justification of the applicable UNESCO criteria;
• Comprehensive documentation (maps, photographs, boundary and buffer-zone maps, and management documentation);
• Assessment of the state of conservation and threats; and
• A long-term management plan.

A considerable proportion of Iran's challenges in World Heritage nominations has stemmed from weaknesses at this stage.

- Submission to the world heritage center and evaluation by ICOMOS / IUCN
• ICOMOS evaluates cultural properties.
• IUCN evaluates natural properties.

Where required, international experts may undertake field missions for on-site assessment.

- **Decision by the world heritage committee**

If the criteria, authenticity, integrity, and the management system/plan are verified and endorsed, the property is inscribed on the World Heritage List (Table 5)

The Role of the Nine Persian Gardens in Developing the Proposed Model for the Nomination of Historic Gardens

An examination of the official UNESCO nomination dossier for the Persian Garden indicates that the nomination process for these nine gardens revealed a combination of achievements and structural challenges. In its evaluation, UNESCO identified the coherence of the chaharbagh paradigm, advanced water-supply systems, high architectural authenticity, and the quality of historical documentation for certain gardens as among the principal strengths of the nomination. Conversely, ICOMOS highlighted several key challenges, including weaknesses in long-term management planning, insufficient GIS-based data, inconsistencies in the delineation of conservation boundaries, and disparities in maintenance standards among the gardens.

Building directly upon these experiences as

Table 5. UNESCO Cultural Criteria and Their Correspondence with the Persian Garden. Source: Authors, based on (HeidarNattaj, 2023; Heidarnattaj, 2015; Motedayen & Motedayen, 2015; Mansouri & Javadi 2019; Javadi, 2021; Fatemi, 2023; Yarahmadi et al., 2022; Sheybani & Hashemi Zadegan, 2017.

UNESCO Cultural Criterion	Criterion Description	Evidence of Correspondence in Persian Gardens
C(i) Masterpiece of human creative genius	To represent an outstanding achievement of human creativity	Precise chaharbagh geometry, harmonious proportions, water-centered design principles, coherent plot subdivision, and sophisticated water-management systems (qanats, controlled slopes, artificial cascades, and intelligent water distribution). Representative examples include Pasargadae, Shazdeh Mahan, and Dowlat Abad.
C(ii) Interchange of cultural values	To exhibit an important interchange of human values at a regional or transregional scale	The paradise (pairidaeza) and chaharbagh model, as a primary prototype of garden design, was transmitted to India, the Ottoman world, Western Asia, and parts of Europe, influencing landscape architecture and urban design traditions. Clear examples include Eram, Chehel Sotoun, and Akbariyeh.
C(iii) Testimony to living or historical traditions	To bear a unique testimony to cultural traditions, living or extinct	A continuous 2,500-year tradition of Persian garden-making; the role of gardens within social, ritual, governmental, and cultural structures; their presence in tombs, palaces, religious complexes, and historic parks. Notable examples include Fin Garden, Chehel Sotoun, and Pasargadae.
C(iv) Outstanding example of architecture or technology	To represent an important stage in the history of architecture or landscape technology	Integration of advanced historical technologies with nature: sloped terraced gardens (e.g., Shazdeh Mahan), traditional cooling systems such as the 33-m windcatcher of Dowlat Abad, columned halls of Chehel Sotoun, and stepped terrace (takht-bandi) design systems.
C(v) Sustainable interaction between humans and the environment	To illustrate traditional human settlement or land-use reflecting sustainable interaction with the environment	Exceptional examples of climatic adaptation: the forest–mountain garden of Abbas Abad, desert gardens such as Dowlat Abad with intelligent water management, and the use of permanent qanat systems in Pahlavanpour, demonstrating long-term sustainability in natural resource use.
C(vi) Association with traditions, beliefs, or artistic works	To be directly or tangibly associated with living traditions, beliefs, or artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance	Reflections of the Persian garden in classical literature (Hafez, Sa'di, Ferdowsi); its presence in visual arts (miniature painting, carpets, and architecture); references to the sacredness of plants and gardens in the Avesta; and the embodiment of the mythological concept of paradise in the chaharbagh layout.

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documented in Nomination File 1372/2011, the proposed model developed in this study follows five foundational pillars: (1) the standardization of documentation and surveying/mapping practices; (2) strengthening the argumentation for Outstanding Universal Value (OUV); (3) establishing an integrated management framework; (4) integrating climatic and structural knowledge into water-management and planting systems; and (5) drawing on successful inscription practices demonstrated in gardens such as Pasargadae, Shazdeh Mahan, and Fin. This model seeks to bridge the gap between UNESCO's general guidance and its practical application to Iran's historic gardens, thereby rendering the preparation of successful World Heritage nomination dossiers more explicit, coherent, and reliable.

• The physical and geometric pattern of the garden

UNESCO's documentation emphasizes that the Persian garden constitutes a distinct human-made environment, demarcated from its surroundings through ordered geometry, primary axes, a quadripartite organizational system, and a structured plot framework. The Persian garden is thus understood as the embodiment of a coherent, human-crafted environmental whole that is clearly differentiated from its broader setting.

This characteristic is consistently repeated across all inscribed Persian gardens as a shared paradigm from the Achaemenid garden of Pasargadae to Qajar-period gardens such as Akbariyeh. Consequently, this geometry-oriented pattern constitutes the analytical and design foundation of the nomination dossier.

• Water system and climatic engineering

According to UNESCO documentation, the core of the Persian garden's Outstanding Universal Value lies in its creative water engineering within the arid climatic context of Iran. Hot and dry conditions characterized by low precipitation, limited humidity, and significant temperature fluctuations provided the environmental framework within which these gardens emerged.

In the nomination dossier of Abbas Abad, the role of brick towers is identified as functioning as pressure regulators and siphoning mechanisms within the water-supply network. In Pasargadae, the earliest examples of stone-lined channels and linear water-distribution systems are recognized as the foundational elements of Persian garden engineering. These cases demonstrate that the water system—its source, distribution method, hydraulic components, and climatic integration—constitutes a fundamental pillar of the theoretical framework of the nomination process.

• Cultural values and UNESCO criteria

The UNESCO dossier emphasizes that the Persian garden serves as a primary source of inspiration for Iranian art, poetry, carpet weaving, miniature painting, and symbolic expression, thereby fulfilling a substantial portion of UNESCO's cultural criteria:

• C(i): Masterpiece of human creative genius chaharbagh geometry, advanced water engineering, and creative contrast with arid climatic conditions;

• C(ii): Interchange of human values – extensive influence on garden design traditions in India, Western Asia, the Arab world, and even Europe;

• C(iii): Testimony to a living cultural tradition – continuity of Persian garden culture over 2,500 years, deeply embedded in Iranian history and mythology;

• C(iv): Outstanding example of a historic landscape – gradual development from Pasargadae through the Qajar period;

• C(vi): Association with living traditions and literary heritage – strong links to classical literature and belief systems, including Hafez, Sa'di, Ferdowsi, and references in the Avesta.

As stated in the UNESCO documentation, "the Persian garden served as a primary reference for the development of garden design in Western Asia and Europe." Accordingly, the proposed research model treats criteria C(i)–C(vi) not merely as descriptive labels, but as analytical and decision-making benchmarks in the construction of new nomination dossiers.

• Relationship between the garden, urban development, and the territorial landscape

UNESCO evaluation reports indicate that Persian gardens should not be interpreted as isolated elements; rather, they often functioned as nuclei for urban formation. In many historical periods, gardens preceded and structured the development of cities. Consequently, the relationship between the garden and water networks, transportation routes, surrounding landscapes, and urban morphology constitutes an integral component of the proposed model.

• Management system, conservation, and monitoring

Within the UNESCO nomination dossier, the management structure is explicitly defined, with the National Persian Garden Base designated as the central authority responsible for overseeing the nominated heritage properties. This structure encompasses:

• systematic documentation;
• conservation planning;
• a comprehensive management plan;
• periodic monitoring; and
• national and local stakeholder participation.

Conclusion

The proposed model developed in this study is grounded in a comparative analysis of the nine Persian gardens inscribed on the World Heritage List (World Heritage Committee, 2011), the ICOMOS evaluation report, and a review of their associated management documentation. An examination of the inscribed dossiers indicates that their successful inscription resulted from a coherent and integrated five-stage framework (Fig. 4):

1. Documentation of water resources and analysis of irrigation and water-management systems;

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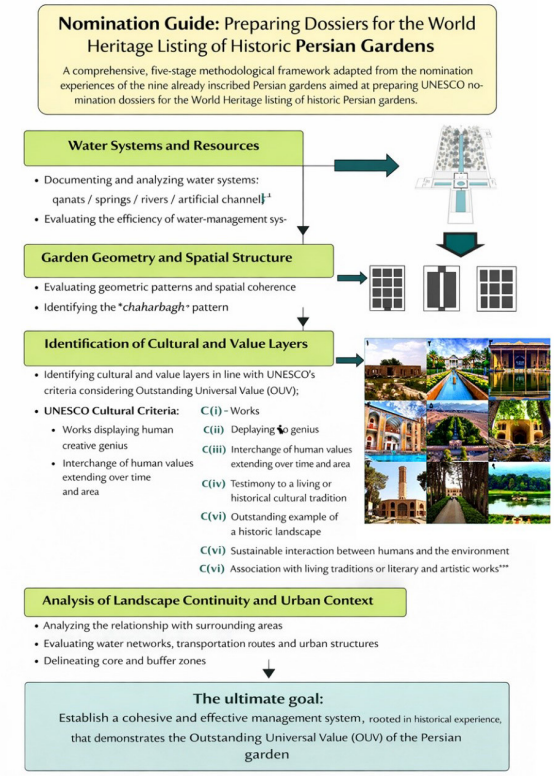


Fig. 4. Applicant's guide to preparing World Heritage nomination dossiers for historic Persian gardens.
Source: Authors

2. Reconstruction and interpretation of geometry and spatial organization;
3. Identification of cultural and value-based layers in accordance with UNESCO criteria;
4. Analysis of landscape continuity and the relationship between the garden and its urban context; and
5. Formulation of an integrated management and conservation plan.

This pattern is consistently observed across all inscribed Persian gardens (Fig. 5) from Pasargadae to Akbariyeh and was therefore extracted as the structural foundation of the proposed model developed in this research. More specifically, the experience of the nine gardens demonstrates that nomination dossiers characterized by a clear management structure, accurate and comprehensive documentation, a well-defined articulation of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), and a thorough analysis of water-management systems exhibited a significantly higher likelihood of successful inscription. These findings constitute the theoretical and empirical basis of the proposed model and indicate that a successful nomination dossier necessarily requires the integration of a triadic framework comprising rigorous documentation, conceptual analysis, and a coherent management plan an approach that has been operationalized within the proposed model of this study.

The findings further indicate that the World Heritage inscription of Persian gardens is achievable only when the nomination dossier is capable of clearly demonstrating the garden's Outstanding Universal

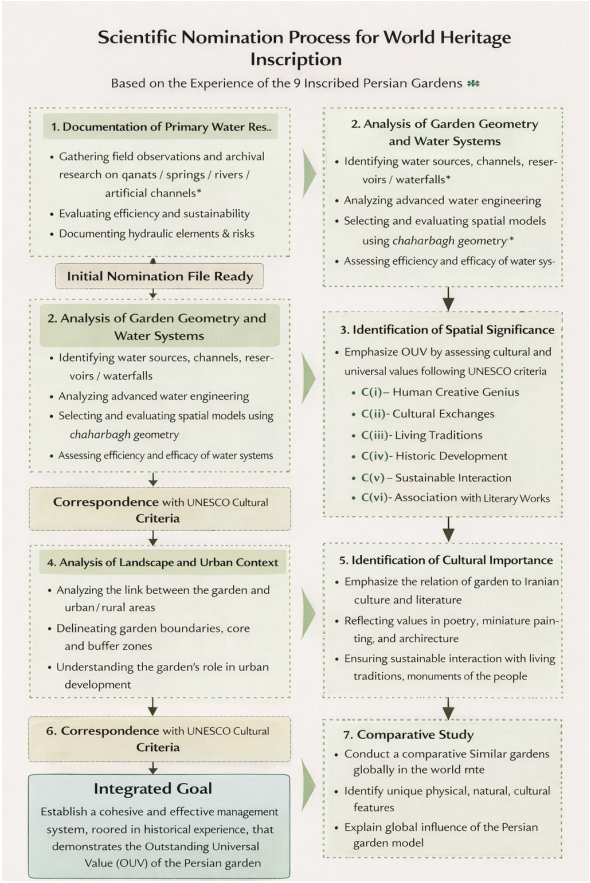


Fig. 5. Scientific process of nominating properties for UNESCO World Heritage inscription. Source: Authors.

Value (OUV) through precise reference to its tangible and intangible attributes. The successful experience of the nine inscribed Persian gardens confirms that a coherent and well-documented model can effectively bridge the gap between UNESCO's general guidelines and their practical application within the specific context of Persian historic gardens.

The model presented in this research constitutes a contextualized, evidence-based, and operational roadmap, developed through the analysis of actual UNESCO nomination dossiers (World Heritage Committee, 2011), and is capable of:
• systematizing the documentation process;
• aligning the extraction of cultural and spatial values with UNESCO criteria;
• elucidating landscape continuity and the authenticity of the garden; and
• providing a defensible and coherent management framework.

A comparative review of the World Heritage nomination dossier of the nine Persian gardens (World Heritage Committee, 2011) reveals that, despite their ultimate success, the nomination process was accompanied by a range of structural, managerial, and environmental challenges. These challenges included structural vulnerability in gardens located within humid environments, declining performance of qanats and water channels, tourism pressure on

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prominent gardens, incomplete technical studies in ancient gardens, threats posed by urban development within core and buffer zones, and disparities in managerial capacity among the gardens. A critical analysis of the UNESCO reports on integrity and authenticity, as well as the state of conservation, indicates that a substantial portion of these difficulties stemmed not from a lack of cultural value but rather from the absence of a systematic framework for documentation, conservation management, and the articulation of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).

Accordingly, this research seeking to address its principal question concerning how to formulate a systematic process for the preparation of World Heritage nomination dossiers for historic Persian gardens employs documentary analysis, comparative analysis, and thematic analysis to extract patterns, shortcomings, and strengths from existing dossiers, culminating in the design of a proposed model for nomination dossier preparation. Emphasizing three fundamental pillars water systems, geometric structure and spatial organization, and cultural identity and the narrative of Outstanding Universal Value the model offers a framework that is context-sensitive yet fully aligned with UNESCO standards, capable of bridging the gap between global guidelines and the realities of Iran's historic gardens.

The results of this research demonstrate that adoption of the proposed model has the potential to significantly enhance the quality of future nomination dossiers. By directly addressing historical challenges encountered in the nomination process, the model facilitates clearer representation of Outstanding Universal Value, strengthens documentation systems, and ensures managerial coherence. Consequently, the development of such a framework represents not only a scholarly necessity for improving the World Heritage nomination process of cultural landscapes in Iran, but also a decisive step toward sustainable conservation, the enhancement of understanding of the Persian garden heritage, and the reinforcement of its position within the global cultural memory.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there was no conflict for them in conducting this research.

Endnote

1. Red indicates the core zone, and blue indicates the buffer zone. These colors are used consistently across all plans included in the UNESCO nomination documentation of the nine Persian Gardens to denote the core and buffer zones.

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