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## Invisible in Borders Bursting the Bubble of an Armenian Sports Complex in Tehran

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**INVISIBLE IN BORDERS: OPENNING UP THE BUBBLE OF AN ARMENIAN  
SPORT COMPLEX IN TEHRAN**

A Thesis Presented

by

ANITA GHORBANI

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

MAY 2024

Department of Architecture

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## ABSTRACT

### **Invisible in Borders: Opening the bubble of an Armenian Sports complex in Tehran**

May 2024

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Directed by: Pari Riahi

"Invisible in Borders" critically investigates the complex nature of borders, focusing on the Armenian minority in Iran, whose religious identity as Christians has led to the demarcation of distinct spatial boundaries. Following the Iranian revolution, a stark division emerged between Muslims and the many minority groups who live in the country, profoundly impacting architectural spaces, and restricting public access. This research centers on The Holy Cross Chapel, an Armenian chapel within a walled sports complex in Tehran called Ararat, symbolizing the visible and invisible borders that outline and limit community interactions. By analyzing the Armenian chapel as a microcosm of larger societal divisions, this thesis aims to contribute insights into the role of design in shaping inclusive spaces, fostering unity, and addressing the complexities of identity, diversity, security, and sense of place within the context of visible and invisible borders in Iran.

This thesis asks the following questions.

How can borders serve as devices for identity, belonging, exclusion, and inequality? How to design a solution of visibility for these borders? How can design as a medium, leverage and modify borders to integrate spaces while maintaining identity, diversity, security, and a perception of the space? What effects might this have on the community, and how might the design process be redesigned in relation to boundaries and at different scales.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



**Figure 1: Collage of the Holy Cross Chapel inside the surrounding wall of Ararat, Tehran, Iran, made by Anita Ghorbani 2024**

#### 1.1 ARMENIANS AND THEIR CONNECTION TO IRAN

In 1604, Shah Abbas I forcibly relocated over 500,000 Armenians from their homeland to Iran, with 20,000 to 30,000 Armenian families settled in the northern regions of Gilan and Mazandaran, while others were moved south, notably establishing the first Armenian community near Isfahan, later known as New Julfa (Iskandarzan 2019).

After the 1915 Armenian Genocide by the Ottoman Empire, many Armenians fled to neighboring countries, including Iran, where they were granted refuge. This event significantly increased the Armenian population in Iran, particularly enriching the Armenian community already present

from earlier migrations. The Armenian community first settled in northern Iran. They were fleeing from violence and seeking refuge. However, their way of life, marked by their resilience, would quickly become integrated into the vibrant city of Tehran, which would serve as both a sanctuary and a challenging environment for safeguarding their traditional customs (Iskandarzan 2019).

During the early stages of migration, the Armenian community established strong communities in northern Iran, leading to the growth of their cultural identity. The Armenian community dug these nooks. The creation of churches, community centers, and educational institutions, as significant cultural contributions, enabled them to reflect their country's collective memory, which is deeply established in centuries of history. These places not only served as religious centers but also played an important role in the preservation and transmission of the Armenian language, customs, and culture.

The Armenian population's move to Tehran was influenced by the appeal of a more cosmopolitan lifestyle and its economic possibilities, culminating in significant integration into the urban fabric. Tehran is Iran's cultural, social, economic, and political center. With a population of almost 12 million as of this writing, it is a busy, dirty, and congested metropolis that is home to every imaginable subset of Iranians. Since the middle of the 20th century, Tehran has surpassed Isfahan as the Iranian Armenian community's hub (Barry 2018). The city, known for its rich historical past, welcomed the Armenian population and incorporated its architectural history into the metropolitan environment. In the busy multicultural environment of Tehran, churches such as the Holy Cross Chapel, located within the Ararat Sports Complex, acted as symbolic pillars demonstrating the continued power of Armenian identity and the unity of the diverse population of Tehran.

## 1.2 REVOLUTION

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 initiated a significant and far-reaching transformation that significantly impacted the life of the Armenian community. Since the 1979 revolution, Iran has formed a Shi'a Islamic identity that aims to cross ethnic and national boundaries. During the same era, Iran's Armenian community, which was once a prominent Christian minority in Tehran, has collapsed by more than 80%. Although the constitution acknowledges the Armenian minority and provides special benefits under Iranian law, they do not enjoy the same privileges as their Shi'a Muslims (Barry 2018).

The revolution produced significant divisions between Muslims and other minority groups as a result of the reconfiguration of cultural norms and power relations that it caused. These changes had a long-term and profound impact on the places where the Armenian people resided, and the repercussions can be seen throughout the Armenian community's architectural legacy.

The revolution profoundly impacted the accessibility and visibility of Armenian architectural history since it stressed Islamic identity and transformed public spaces. The Armenian community's capacity to access and connect with its architectural and cultural past was limited by tangible and intangible barriers, posing problems for once-thriving cultural centers. Changes in the geopolitical environment impacted communities that had historically functioned as channels for cultural exchange.

The Holy Cross Chapel, located within the Ararat Sports Complex, evolved as a symbolic depiction during this change. Initially used for communal prayer and meetings, the walls of this structure evolved into a monument to the dynamic and changing character of religious and cultural manifestations. Because of the cultural inequalities reflected in the physical and metaphorical barriers around these locations, the Armenian minority's architectural history was marked by a complex interplay of visibility and invisibility.

### **1.3 OTHER MINORITIES**

The Armenian community in Tehran is not the only minority group that has struggled to preserve its cultural identity and architectural history since the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Several other ethnic and religious minorities in Iran faced comparable challenges as a result of the emphasis on Islamic identity and the reorganization of cultural norms and power dynamics following the revolution.

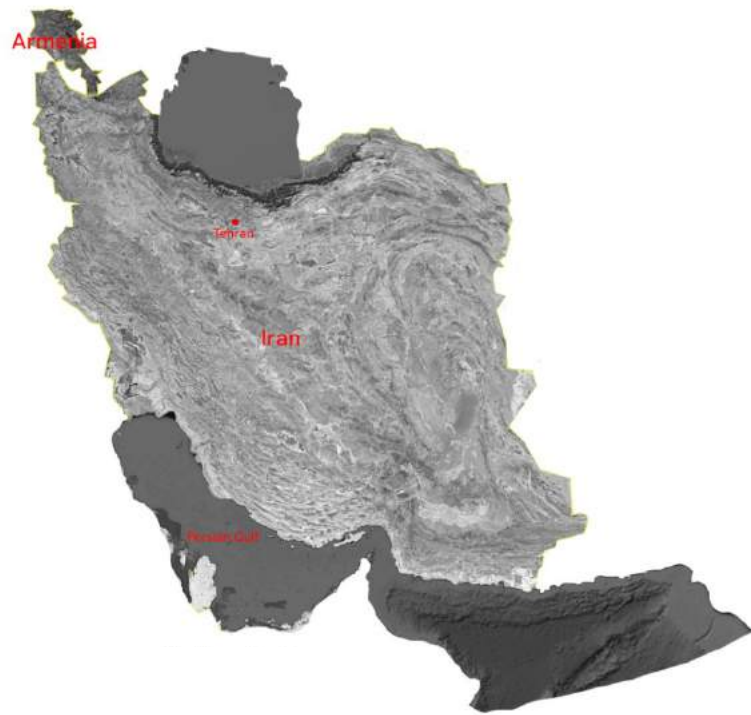
One such minority group is the Assyrian Christians, who have a lengthy history in Iran going back centuries. Like the Armenians, the Assyrian community faced barriers to accessing and preserving cultural and religious buildings, such as churches and community centers. The revolution tremendously influenced their architectural heritage and public perception of their cultural identity (Barry 2018).

The Baha'i community, another religious minority in Iran, has also endured tremendous persecution and discrimination since the revolution. Many of their religious and cultural landmarks, notably the Baha'i House of Worship in Tehran, have been taken or destroyed, making it difficult for them to maintain their architectural history and practice their faith freely (Barry 2018).

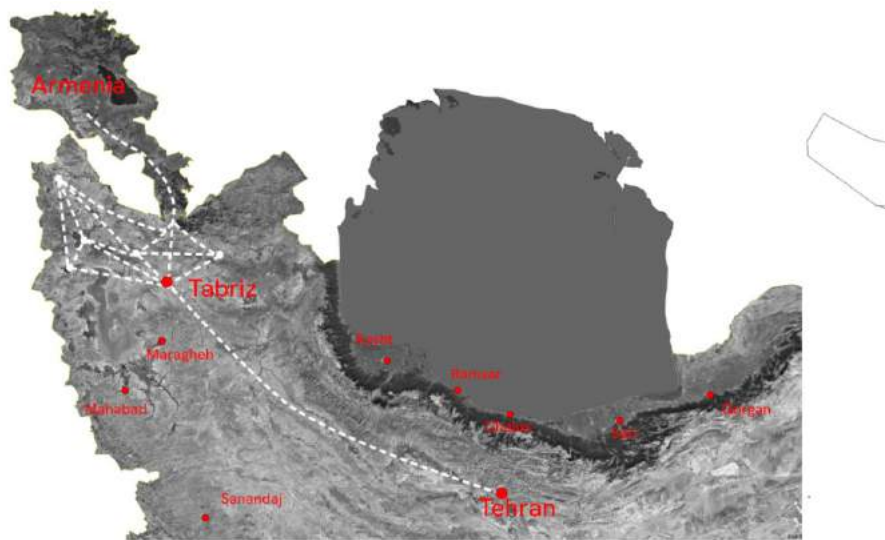
The Zoroastrian, one of Iran's oldest religious minorities, has likewise struggled to preserve its cultural and architectural heritage since the revolution. Their fire temples and other sacred locations have been restricted, limiting their capacity to perform their customs freely (Barry 2018).

It is crucial to stress that the problems confronting these minority groups are not confined to preserving their architectural legacy but include broader questions of cultural identity, freedom of speech, and equality.

Barry James, during a visit to Iran, described a vivid scene at an Armenian wedding he attended at Saint Sarkis Cathedral in the summer of 2010, which highlighted the clear distinctions between religious minorities and the Shi'a majority in Iran. At the wedding, he joined other guests in the courtyard of the church compound to celebrate the couple. It was late afternoon, and the weather was warm yet comfortable. Just beyond the walls of the compound and through a partially open gate, the bustling streets of central Tehran offered a stark contrast to the scene inside. Barry observed an Armenian wedding where women, unveiled and not adhering to the typical dress codes of hijab or manteau required in public spaces in Tehran, presented a sight rarely seen. Curious onlookers from the outside world paused to gaze into the compound. A car full of young men deliberately slowed traffic to catch a glimpse, and women in chadors stopped to look inside. Their expressions were not of disgust or shock but of deep interest and perhaps bafflement at encountering a cultural spectacle so different from their own (Barry 2018).

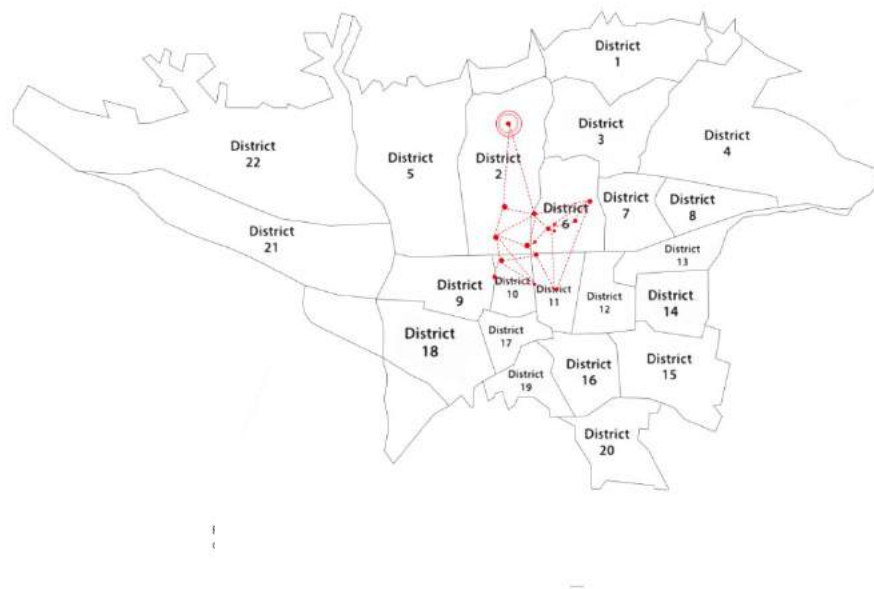


**Figure 2: Aerial view of Iran and the connection to Armenia by Anita Ghorbani 2024**



**Figure 3: Immigration of Armenians after Genocide, Map of Iran and Armenia by Anita Ghorbani 2024**





**Figure 4: Pinned locations of Churches and Chapels, Map of Tehran with different Districts by Anita Ghorbani 2024**

#### 1.4 THE IDEA OF UTOPIA AND HETEROTOPIA

Michel Foucault's concepts of utopia and heterotopia are critical in assessing the Ararat Sports Complex and its Armenian chapel in Tehran, Iran. They emphasize the complex interaction of cultural norms and spatial dynamics. In Foucault's paradigm, utopia is an idealistic, non-existent environment that critiques current societal standards. In contrast, heterotopia refers to genuine, physical locations that embody and juxtapose various levels of meaning and existence inside a real society (Foucault 1986).

The Ararat Sports Complex is an excellent example of a heterotopia. It exists as a physical location inside the greater context of Tehran. However, it operates under a set of standards and practices markedly different from those imposed beyond its borders. Barry James mentions, "I

was struck by the thought that before me were two groups of people, both Iranian citizens, who were living side by side but entirely separately from one another" (Barry 2018).

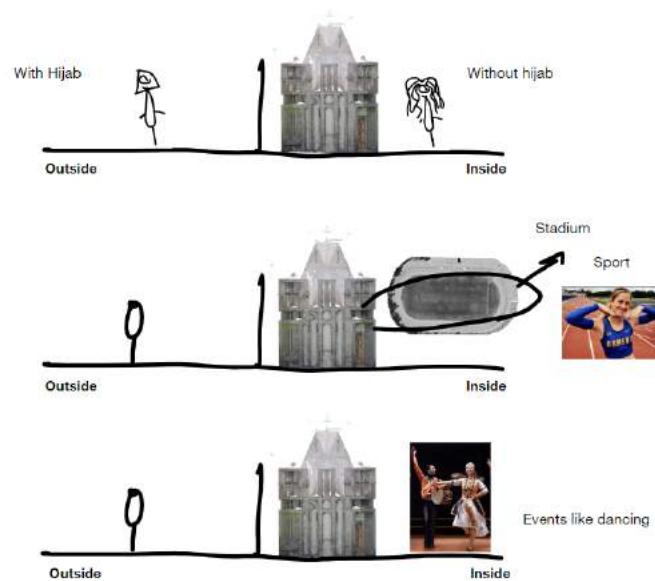
Inside the complex, Armenian boys and girls participate in sports together, directly challenging the strict gender segregation typical in Iranian society. Furthermore, the complex is a cultural hub, preserving and promoting Armenian customs and festivals such as traditional dances and social meetings. These traditions strengthen communal relationships and are essential for maintaining cultural identity within a minority population.

This interior sanctuary, surrounded and protected by walls, essentially functions as a slice of utopia—where principles of equality, community life, and cultural preservation are achieved to an impossible level outside the social context. These walls are more than simply physical barriers; they are symbolic borders that define a safe place in which the Armenian minority may openly express and practice their cultural identity without interference from prevailing cultural laws and norms.

Outside these gates, reality changes significantly. Tehran's exterior environment is governed strictly by Islamic law, with public life severely restricted, including clothing restrictions and social interactions. It operates as a "counter-site" in which the conventional cultural scripts are rewritten, creating a world inside a world that simultaneously imitates and resists the greater society structure.

In this way, the Ararat Sports Complex's wall is more than just an architectural element; it also makes a profound cultural statement. It serves as a defender and a divider, safeguarding a minority culture from possible marginalization while exposing the differences and exclusions inherent in the larger social framework. The wall's dual purpose emphasizes the complex's status as a heterotopia, a site of difference that contradicts mainstream culture's narrative while offering a shelter for variety and an opportunity for testing utopian ideas.

Thus, the Ararat Sports Complex and its Armenian church serve as places of sanctuary and cultural expression and as locations of resistance and critique. They provide a compelling reflection on negotiating identities and borders in a homogenous and fractured society. The complex's heterotopic lens reveals the subtle dance between conformity and resistance, between the yearning for cultural preservation and the constraints of modern integration.



**Figure 5: A Diagram of a collage of the Holy Cross Chapel as a section showing the difference between inside and outside, Tehran, Iran, made by Anita Ghorbani 2024**

In the Figure 2 diagram, I aim to illustrate the contrasting lifestyles within and outside the wall. Inside the wall, the environment is depicted as more liberal, where boys and girls can engage in sports together. Outside the wall, the setting adheres to more traditional norms, where hijabs are mandatory, and restrictions are placed on physical activities: boys and girls cannot play sports together, and dancing, particularly for girls, is prohibited. This visual highlights the stark differences in social norms and cultural practices based on the location.

The thesis titled "Invisible in Borders" seeks to explore the nuanced interplay between architectural design, cultural identity, and visibility in Tehran, with a particular focus on

the Armenian community. Through the lens of the Holy Cross Chapel, designed by Rostom Voscanian, this research aims to dissect how architectural elements can serve as both barriers and bridges in cultural expression and integration.

The primary objective of the thesis is to evaluate how design can be employed strategically to make cultural borders more visible to the general public of Tehran while maintaining security and sanctity for the Armenian community. This involves a careful consideration of how architectural design can integrate spaces, allowing the outdoor public glimpses into the community activities and the iconic chapel, which stands as a symbol of Armenian heritage and resilience.

This thesis also intends to investigate how these architectural interventions can facilitate a better understanding and appreciation among Tehran's broader population. By creating semi-permeable borders—physical spaces where interaction is possible without compromising the cultural integrity of the Armenian community—the design aims to foster a mutual respect and curiosity. This approach challenges the conventional narrative of minorities living isolated within a metropolis, proposing a model where cultural spaces preserve identity and promote shared experiences.

Furthermore, the research will delve into the complex dynamics of 'invisible borders'—the subtle social, cultural, and psychological barriers that impact everyday interactions and communal life. By spotlighting these often overlooked aspects, the study seeks to uncover how architectural design can enhance visibility and accessibility, enriching Tehran's cultural tapestry.

In practical terms, the thesis will propose design modifications and interventions at the Ararat Sports Complex and Holy Cross Chapel that make these spaces more inclusive while preserving their cultural significance. For example, integrating transparent elements or viewing platforms that allow unobtrusive observation of cultural events or architectural features could serve as educational tools and points of engagement for the wider community.

The thesis aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how architecture can influence and facilitate cultural dialogue by combining theoretical analysis with design proposals. This exploration into the potential of design as a mediator and enhancer of cultural visibility not only addresses the needs of the Armenian community in Tehran but also offers insights that could be applicable to other minority groups facing similar challenges.

Overall, "Invisible in Borders" aspires to provide a holistic view of the interconnections between space, identity, and visibility, advocating for a design approach that respects diversity while encouraging integration and interaction. Through this research, the potential of architecture to act as a catalyst for cultural understanding and coexistence is thoroughly examined, aiming to create a blueprint for more inclusive urban environments.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review explores the interplay between Armenian identity, architectural expression, and spatial negotiations within the socio-political landscape of Iran, particularly following the Islamic Revolution. The objective is to understand how the Armenian community has used architecture and space to maintain their cultural identity amidst the broader Iranian society. This analysis draws on a range of sources, including scholarly articles, books, and architectural critiques, focusing on themes such as identity and ethnicity, the historical context of key sites and architects, theoretical perspectives on space and borders, and general knowledge about borders.

#### **2.1 IDENTITY AND BACKGROUND OF ARMENIANS AND THEIR HISTORY WITH EMIGRATION**

Armenians in Iran have a unique ethnic and religious identity shaped by centuries of history and complex socio-political dynamics. Barry (2018) provides a comprehensive examination of Armenian Christians in Iran, detailing the community's navigation of their minority status within a predominantly Shia Muslim country. This work highlights the dual identity of Armenians as both ethnically distinct and religiously Christian, which has implications for their social and employment opportunities within the Islamic Republic (Barry 2018).

Iskandarzan (2019) complements Barry's insights by discussing the contemporary challenges faced by the Armenian community, including migration driven by socio-economic pressures and political constraints. This article is crucial for understanding the factors influencing Armenian emigration, highlighting how external pressures such as regional conflicts and international

sanctions have reshaped community dynamics and identity preservation strategies (Iskandarzan 2019).

## **2.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT ABOUT THE SITE AND THE ARCHITECT**

The architectural contributions of Rostom Voskanian, particularly his designs for the Ararat Sports Complex and the Holy Cross Chapel, serve as focal points for discussing Armenian architectural identity in Iran. The Armenian Mirror-Spectator (2013) describes Voskanian's legacy and his role in embedding Armenian cultural symbols into Iran's urban fabric through his innovative architectural designs. These buildings not only provide spaces for community gathering and religious practices but also stand as monuments of Armenian heritage within Iran (The Armenian Mirror-Spectator 2013).

Voskanian's architectural style, which integrates modernist elements with traditional Armenian motifs, reflects a broader narrative of cultural preservation through built forms. This is seen in how the Holy Cross Chapel and the Ararat Sports Complex have become symbols of the Armenian community's resilience and adaptability (Grigor n.d.).

## **2.3 BORDERS**

The concept of borders, both tangible and intangible, plays a critical role in the Armenian community's experience in Iran. Diener and Hagen (2012) introduce borders as multifaceted constructs that extend beyond physical demarcations to include social, cultural, and economic dimensions. For the Armenian community, these borders are also symbolic, delineating their identity within the broader Islamic Republic (Diener and Hagen 2012).

Further expanding on this concept, Diener and Hagen (2022) explore how invisible borders affect power dynamics, mobility, and belonging. Their work provides insights into the invisible barriers faced by the Armenians in Iran, shaped by legislation, societal expectations, and cultural norms,

which significantly impact their mobility and integration within Iranian society (Diener and Hagen 2022).

## **2.4 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Foucault's (1986) theory of heterotopias offers a valuable lens for examining the spaces occupied by the Armenian community in Iran. These spaces, conceptualized as realms of otherness, allow for the preservation of Armenian cultural and religious practices within a dominant culture.

Foucault's ideas help contextualize the Armenian community's spatial practices as acts of resistance and identity preservation (Foucault 1986).

Rael (2017) adds another dimension by discussing how architectural structures, such as borders, embody and influence socio-political divisions. By analogy, Armenian architectural endeavors in Iran can be seen as both conforming to and challenging societal norms, thereby negotiating their place within the Iranian national narrative (Rael 2017).

Lastly, the reviewed literature collectively highlights the complex relationship between Armenian identity, architecture, and spatial dynamics in Iran. The sources reviewed provide a comprehensive view of how Armenians have utilized architectural and spatial strategies to negotiate their identity and maintain cultural continuity in a context marked by political and social constraints. This review not only underscores the resilience of the Armenian community but also points to gaps in understanding how younger generations of Iranian-Armenians navigate their identities today. Future research could explore these dynamics further, particularly in the context of Iran's rapidly changing socio-political environment.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

My research began with an in-depth investigation of the Armenians' historical background, followed by a larger examination of the notion of walls and boundaries throughout history. This fundamental phase was critical for understanding how physical and metaphorical borders shape cultural and social relationships.

After creating a historical framework, I looked into individual case studies that matched my subject interests. Examining situations where walls and borders were critical in encouraging or hindering cultural exchanges provided me with significant insights into their broad uses and ramifications in many societal contexts.

The next phase in my process was a thorough site investigation of the Ararat Sports Complex. I searched the complex's archives and found a site plan that described several areas on the property. The plan helped us grasp the complex's spatial arrangement and functional zoning.

To better understand the spatial dynamics at the complex, I created an approximate 3D model with Rhino, a powerful 3D modeling software. Translating the site plan into a virtual model enabled me to see and better understand how the many aspects and regions of the complex interacted.

With the 3D model in place, I began a more in-depth analytical examination. I began by cutting parts and drafting various schematics and layouts. These techniques allowed me to analyze the complex, looking at the interaction of spaces and their functional and symbolic meaning. This method revealed how architectural components and spatial arrangements contributed to the

Armenians' feeling of community and cultural identity. However, it also allowed for a thorough assessment of prospective design remedies.

This multilayered analytical technique proved beneficial, aided by 3D modeling and diagrammatic investigation. It enabled me to provide educated, context-sensitive design ideas to improve the complex's functioning and inclusion. Finally, this technique gave me the tools I needed to propose architectural and spatial options for creating a more inclusive atmosphere while honoring and strengthening the Armenian community's cultural history inside the complex.

## CHAPTER 4

### FROM BUILDING TO DRAWING RESEARCH

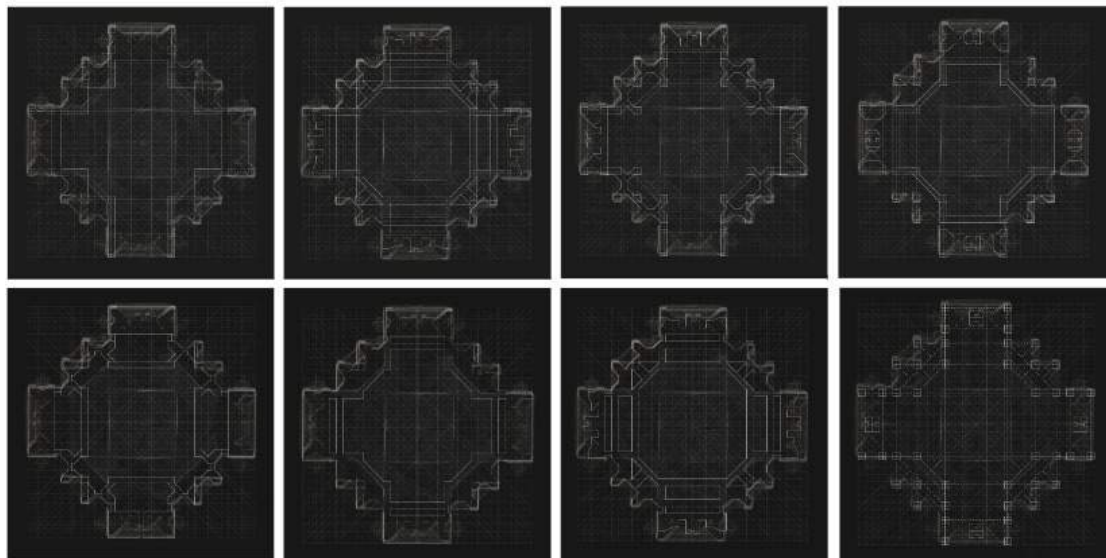
During my time in Iran before I came to the United States for my M.Arch program, I had the opportunity to participate in an advanced study project called "From Building to Drawing," Lectured by Farnoosh Farmer. This study focused on the complex topic of architectural documentation in Iran.

As part of the study, participants were divided into groups to focus on different historical buildings. In my team, I worked with Parsa Movassaghi and two Armenian teammates, Narineh Davoodian and Ninel Shahnazarian. Our group chose to explore the Holy Cross Chapel, a historical monument located within the Ararat Sports Complex in Tehran's Vanak area designed by Rostom Voscanian, an Armenian architect.

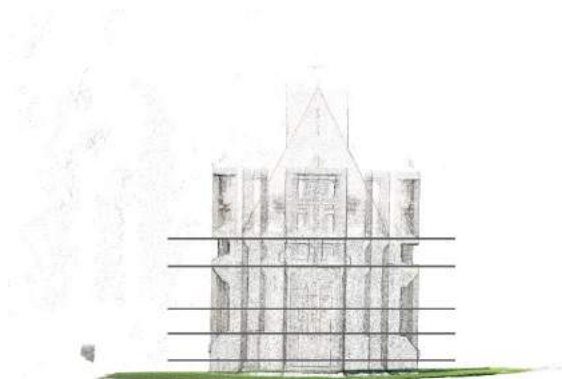
The primary task for each group member was to create four unique architectural drawings of the chosen structure. Given the chapel's significance and the complexity of its construction, this work demanded a careful approach to documenting. However, access to the chapel was restricted to non-Armenian visitors, which posed a unique challenge for Parsa and me, as we were not Armenian.

To solve this difficulty, Narineh and Ninel went to the church and did a thorough photographic survey, getting around 100 photographs from all angles and viewpoints. These images were critical to our documenting procedure. We loaded these photos into "Reality Capture," a software that creates detailed 3D models from photographs using point clouds. This technology helped to create a realistic 3D model of the chapel, which included thousands of data points that represented the structure's physical form.

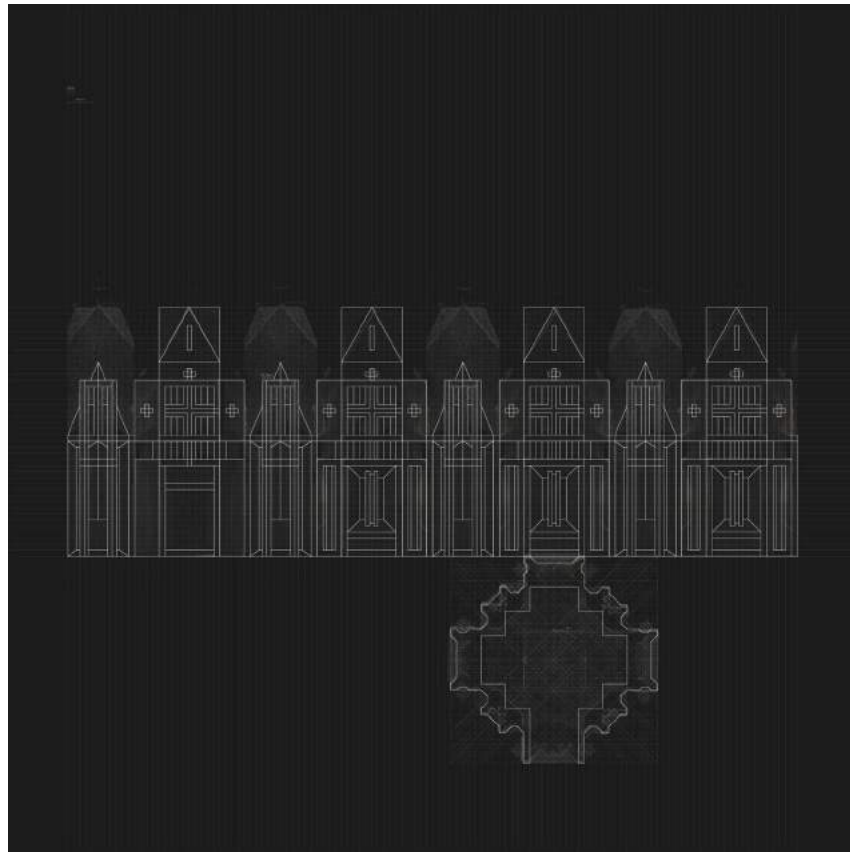
With the 3D model as a basis, we began our analysis, methodically studying the chapel's architectural details and spatial structure. This investigation enabled us to create a set of precise drawings that not only represented the chapel's physical qualities, but also highlighted its architectural and historical significance. The designs were a combination of technical accuracy and imaginative interpretation, capturing both the physical structure and the intangible tradition of the Holy Cross Chapel.



**Figure 6: Plans from different levels of Poche, the Holy Cross Chapel, From Building to Drawing, Tehran, Iran by Anita Ghorbani**



**Figure 7: Different levels of Poche in section, the Holy Cross Chapel, From Building to Drawing, Tehran, Iran by Anita Ghorbani**



**Figure 8: An Unfolded Elevation, From Building to Drawing, The Holy Cross Chapel, Tehran, Iran by Anita Ghorbani**

## CHAPTER 5

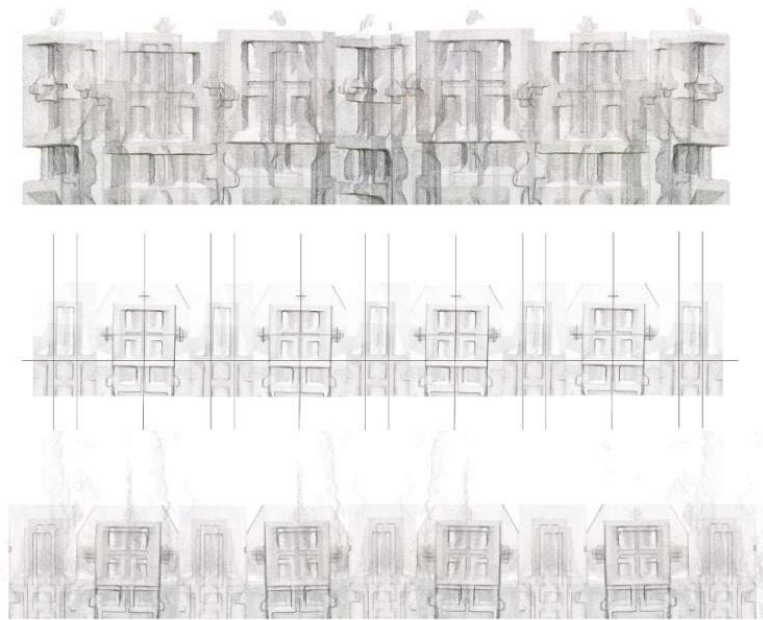
### EXPLORATORY PATHS: PAVING THE WAY TO THE FINAL TOPIC

In the early stages of my thesis, I intended to dive more into the architectural research I had previously undertaken on the Holy Cross Chapel, a structure known for its intricate and visually remarkable concrete construction. I intended to create more architectural drawings that would capture and explore the chapel's intricate aesthetic and structural features.

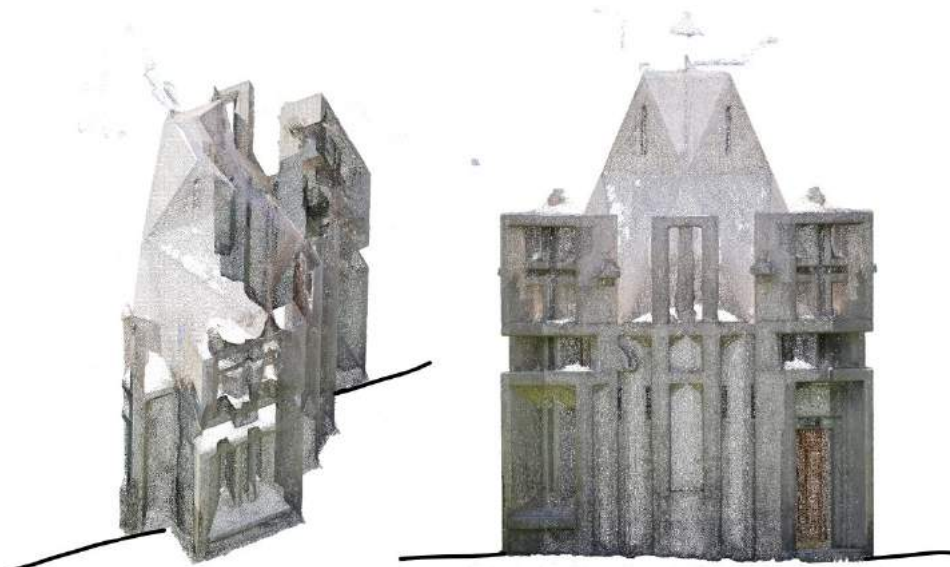
However, as my investigation advanced, I was drawn to a disturbing element that appeared to be peripheral at first—the chapel's wall. This physical barrier, which stopped me from seeing the church in person, became an important topic of interest in my research. The wall's imposing presence and the division it created motivated an increased curiosity about the larger implications of architectural barriers.

This shift in focus prompted me to reconsider the main topic of my thesis. I got more interested in the wall's symbolic and functional features. What began as an in-depth evaluation of the chapel's architectural beauty turned into a critical critique of the obstacles that define and limit access to such locations.

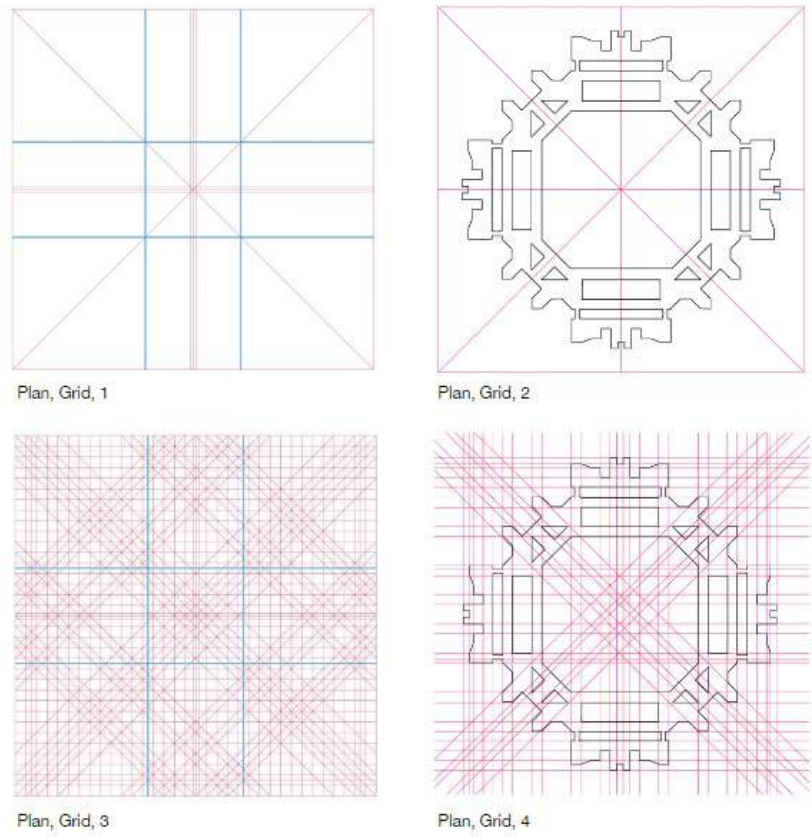
This investigation opened up fresh perspectives for examining how architecture interacts with social and cultural borders, ultimately leading me to choose a final thesis subject on the more considerable influence of physical and metaphorical barriers in urban settings. This new focus not only expanded my academic research but also gave me a more sophisticated understanding of how physical surroundings impact the human experience.



**Figure 9: Analysis of the Holy Cross Chapel with playing with 3D point clouds by Anita Ghorbani 2024**



**Figure 10: Isometric views of the Holy Cross Chapel with playing with 3D point clouds by Anita Ghorbani 2024**



**Figure 11: Plan analysis of the Holy Cross Chapel by Anita Ghorbani 2024**



## CHAPTER 6

### ARARAT SPORTS COMPLEX: A TESTAMENT TO ARMENIAN HERITAGE IN TEHRAN



**Figure 12: Picture from Ararat Stadium, (Brown Book Magazine 2017).**

#### **6.1 ESTABLISHMENT AND ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

In 1971, Voskanian completed his greatest commission for the Ararat Armenian Cultural Organization, which was a 10,000-seat sporting stadium in northern Tehran. The two-hectare-plus property has historically belonged to the Armenian community as a Christian cemetery since the 17th century. A six-person team was constituted to oversee the implementation of this large project. A design competition was established, and he won first prize from Charles Aznavour.

(Arevshatian 1991). The Ararat Sports Complex, established in 1944, is not just a facility for athletic activities but a cultural beacon for the Armenian-Iranian community in Tehran. It is situated in the Vanak neighborhood, a suburb known for its serene, tree-lined streets and vibrant community life. The complex itself spans a considerable 74,000 square meters, offering a vast array of facilities tailored to both sports and cultural events. The development of the complex, particularly its significant expansions and the addition of the Holy Cross Chapel was led by Rostom Voskanian, a renowned Armenian-Iranian architect whose vision was to create a space that not only facilitated physical activities but also fostered community interaction and cultural preservation (Arevshatian 1991).

## **6.2 VANAK: A CULTURAL MOSAIC**

Vanak serves as a subtle yet integral backdrop to the Ararat Sports Complex. Unlike the distinctly Armenian quarters in cities like Isfahan or Beirut, Vanak's Armenian presence is woven into the fabric of the neighborhood through various cultural and culinary venues. This integration helps maintain a calm yet vibrant atmosphere, making Vanak a cherished part of Tehran's broader cultural landscape. As Ara Satoorian, a long-standing member of the Armenian Cultural Ararat Organisation, notes, "You almost feel like you're outside Tehran here," highlighting the unique cultural enclave that Vanak represents within the bustling city (Brown Book Magazine 2017, #).

## **6.3 PURPOSE AND MOTIVATION FOR BUILDING ARARAT**

The Ararat Sports Complex was conceived as a means to provide the Armenian community in Tehran with a space where they could not only engage in sports but also connect with their cultural roots and celebrate their heritage. The complex was named after Mount Ararat, a central symbol in Armenian culture and history, believed to be the landing place of Noah's Ark. This symbolic naming underscores the complex's role as a cultural ark, preserving and nurturing the Armenian identity far from the homeland. (Brown Book Magazine 2017).

## **6.4 CHALLENGES IN CONSTRUCTION**

The construction and expansion of the Ararat Sports Complex faced numerous challenges, primarily due to the political and social tensions in Iran, especially during the late 20th century. Securing the land for the complex was a significant hurdle, given its prime location and historical significance as a former Christian cemetery. The project required delicate negotiation and political maneuvering to overcome bureaucratic obstacles and to ensure that the complex could serve its intended purpose without disruption. Political support from influential figures was crucial in navigating these challenges. "It was a very difficult project. If it were not for an Armenian parliamentarian who was a close friend of Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, it would have never happened," recalls Voskanian, emphasizing the complex political landscape within which the complex was realized (Arevshatian 1991).

## **6.5 FACILITIES AND ATMOSPHERE**

The Ararat Sports Complex boasts an impressive array of facilities designed to cater to a wide range of sports and recreational activities. These include tennis courts, swimming pools, basketball courts, soccer fields, and more specialized areas like billiard tables and rock climbing facilities. Additionally, the complex houses a museum-like space displaying memorabilia and photographs that document decades of Armenian participation in sports, serving as a living archive of the community's athletic achievements.

The atmosphere within the complex is distinctly Armenian, with signs in Armenian script, Armenian coffee served, and traditional music playing, creating a strong connection to the homeland. "Connections to the homeland are everywhere within this self-contained space," states Teni Tarverdian, a member of Ararat, emphasizing the complex's role in maintaining cultural ties (Brown Book Magazine 2017).

## **6.6 COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL IMPACT**

Ararat is more than just a sports complex; it is a vital cultural hub where the Armenian community in Tehran can express and preserve their ethnic, religious, and linguistic uniqueness. It facilitates a deep-rooted sense of community pride and serves as a place where Armenians, regardless of their age or background, gather for sports, weddings, cultural performances, and community celebrations. This engagement is crucial for sustaining the Armenian identity in the diaspora. "Everyone comes here at one point or another, whether it's for a wedding or to watch a play," says Tarverdian, highlighting the central role of Ararat in the community's social life. (Brown Book Magazine 2017)

The Ararat Sports Complex stands as a testament to the resilience and commitment of the Armenian community to preserve their culture and identity in Tehran. Through its comprehensive facilities and the iconic Holy Cross Chapel, designed by Voskanian, Ararat not only accommodates a wide range of physical and cultural activities but also embodies the spirit of the Armenian diaspora. It remains a pivotal place for Armenians in Tehran, encapsulating a blend of modern architecture and community-focused initiatives that continue to foster a strong sense of identity and belonging among its members.



**Figure 13: Aerial view showing the Arart Sport Complex and the Holy Cross Chapel with the Highlighted border surrounding the site by Anita Ghorbani 2024**

## CHAPTER 7

### ABOUT THE HOLY CROSS CHAPEL AND ITS ARCHITECT



**Figure 14: Picture from The Holy Cross Chapel (Brown Book Magazine 2017).**

#### **7.1 ARCHITECT'S BACKGROUND:**

Rostom Voskanian, born into a Christian Armenian family in Tabriz (Grigor 2013), was deeply influenced by his father, a professional photographer. From a young age, he was captivated by the intricate workings of his father's photography lab, often drawing inspiration from his father's sketchbooks. Voskanian's unique approach involved reinterpreting other artists' works by infusing them with his personal style, a method he refined over time (Arevshatian, 1991).

His architectural prowess earned him the fifth Paris scholarship, sponsored by the state for architects to study abroad. After graduating from the prestigious l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1964, he returned to Tehran University (Grigor 2013). Here, under the mentorship of the renowned Iranian architect Houshang Seyhoun, he quickly ascended to the position of dean of the School of Architecture, a post he held until the university's temporary closure in 1980 ("Rostom Voskanian's Architectural Legacy," 2013).

Seyhoun, one of Iran's first Beaux-Art architects, was critical of the Armenian Architect's design namely leading first-generation architects Vartan Hovanesian and Gabriel Guevrekian, since, as Voskanian commented, modernity was being chased ("Rostom Voskanian's Architectural Legacy" 2013).

During the transformative years of the 1960s and 70s, Voskanian witnessed and then led the stylistic evolution in Iranian architecture. Under his influence, Tehran University embraced Regionalism and cultural sensitivity, moving away from the Formalism that had dominated earlier decades. His philosophy was significantly shaped during a 1973 visit to the office of Louis Kahn, whose attention to monumental regionalism inspired Voskanian to integrate similar principles into his own work ("Rostom Voskanian's Architectural Legacy," 2013).

During the mid-1960s, Rostom Voskanian observed significant stylistic changes unfolding in Iran, and he soon became a key player in driving these transformations. By the early 1970s, he noted a shift in architectural focus at the university level, highlighting a growing embrace of Regionalism and cultural sensitivity, and a move away from Formalism. This period marked a departure from the International Style that dominated the 1930s and the Beaux-Arts principles prevalent in the 1950s, leading to the development of a modern architectural style that was both unique to and reflective of Iran's local context ("Rostom Voskanian's Architectural Legacy," 2013).

Voskanian paid a special visit to the office of famous architect Louis Kahn in 1973 and looked at his large-scale, meticulously detailed creations. Particularly Kahn's massive regionalism influenced Voskanian's later building. Kahn was putting forth to the world a new, regionally based modernism, one that Voskanian dutifully continued in Iran. Voskanian had no idea that the remaining twenty years of his creative life would be spent in close proximity to Kahn's masterwork, the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California (Grigor 2013).

## **7.2 ABOUT THE HOLY CROSS CHAPEL:**

Built in 1987 in the southeast corner of the sports complex in north Tehran's Vanak area, Voskanian's design of the Holy Cross Chapel marks a revolutionary change in Armenian religious architecture. Stressing the chapel's continuing importance to the Tehrani Armenian community, Satoorian says, "Rostom Voskanian did something that had never been done before — he built an Armenian church made out of concrete." (Brown Book Magazine 2017).

Talinn Grigor describes Voskanian's work as a "sober, real, and deeply persuasive answer to the wide-ranging dilemmas of modernism" between the 1960s and 1990s (Grigor 2013).

The Iranian Revolution that took an Islamic turn in 1980-82, gave urgency to the construction of an explicitly Christian icon in the existing stadium complex. Iranian identity framed by the authorities in terms of religion compelled minorities, including Armenians, to represent themselves as religious minorities. The project was proposed as a memorial for Armenians who had died in the Iran-Iraq war with this Voskanian got the approval (Arevshatian 1991). Although initially the complex was designed and used as a secular space, Ararat's governing committee judged it best in the early 1980s to erect an Armenian Apostolic chapel in order to continue to preserve the complex as a property belong to the Armenian community. ("Rostom Voskanian's Architectural Legacy" 2013).



A 1985 project to build a chapel behind the stadium faced more obstacles because of the government's reluctance to permit construction of new minority religious structures. "There was an old cemetery behind the stadium that had to be leveled to accommodate further expansion of the complex. Out of respect to those who had been buried in that area, I wanted to build an unusual memorial: the Holy Cross Chapel," Voskanian explained. In order to win government's approval, as many properties were being seized during the chaos of the revolution, the governing committee petitioned for an urgent approval of the design of the proposed chapel by the Armenian Apostolic Prelacy of Iran (Arevshatian 1991).

Voskanian's scheme was a masterpiece of modern Armenian architecture: a reinterpretation in poured concrete of the best examples of medieval Armenian churches, transformed into an interwoven system of supports, openings, and suspensions. While remaining true to the symmetric and central floor plan of domed architecture of medieval Armenian churches, for instance that of Saint Hripsimeh in Ejmiatsin or the Holy Cross (Surb Khatch) on the island of Akhtamar, Voskanian carves out a novel form that boldly incarnates the elevation and section of traditional churches into an allegorical representation of the Christian cross: simultaneously ancient and avant-garde. An architecture of sculpture or a sculpted architecture, the chapel stands as the most powerful symbol of the endurance of Armenian identity as both ancient and contemporary (Grigor, n.d.).

Voskanian's avant-garde architecture was highly progressive and revolutionary, then and now. Finding the proposal, as it were, "too modern and unorthodox," the Armenian prelate ordered the imitation of a church in Antioch, Syria, dating from the 19th century (Grigor, n.d.).

As most revolutions do, the Iranian Revolution has taken away from artists and architects their livelihood and peace of mind, as well as their guarantee of posterity. Voskanian left behind a legacy and a tradition in Iranian-Armenian modern architecture when he left Tehran in 1988. By

so doing, he also left behind his architectural practice. Moving to Southern California, he showed an exceptional ability to adapt. (“Rostom Voskanian’s Architectural Legacy” 2013).

## CHAPTER 8

### BORDERS, IDENTITY AND BELONGING

borders as critical instruments for organizing space and managing populations. Functionally, borders are tools for political and administrative control, used to regulate the flow of people, goods, services, and capital. They are vital for maintaining security, enforcing laws, and managing resources. Symbolically, borders are powerful constructs that help form national identities, fostering a sense of unity and distinctiveness by delineating 'us' from 'them.' (Diener and Hagen 2012).

The materiality of borders manifests in various forms, ranging from the tangible—such as walls and fences—to the intangible, often referred to as invisible borders. These physical and invisible boundaries are instrumental in defining the sovereign territories of nations, regulating movement, and impacting both the environment and the socio-economic structures within and between countries. Below, we explore how different types of material borders serve multiple functions and have wide-ranging implications.

Physical borders such as walls and fences primarily serve to enhance national security. By erecting these barriers, countries aim to prevent unauthorized entry, deter smuggling, and protect against potential threats, especially in regions marked by high geopolitical tensions or substantial illegal immigration issues (Diener & Hagen, 2012). These structures are used to physically demarcate entry points, allowing nations to more effectively monitor and manage who and what crosses their borders.

The presence of physical barriers also carries significant symbolism and serves as a deterrent. They embody the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a nation, sending a clear message about

the country's boundaries and its resolve in enforcing them. The daunting physical presence of walls and fences can deter potential illegal crossers by highlighting the difficulties and dangers of attempting to bypass these formidable obstacles (Diener & Hagen, 2022).

Moreover, the political implications of physical borders are profound. They can be utilized to assert dominance, control disputed territories, or implement policies related to immigration and border control. The construction of such barriers often responds to domestic political pressures and can become a highly contentious issue, both domestically and internationally (Diener & Hagen, 2022).

The construction and maintenance of physical borders can have significant environmental impacts. They may disrupt local ecosystems, hinder the migration of wildlife, and alter natural landscapes. Environmental considerations are often secondary to security concerns, leading to potential ecological damage (Diener & Hagen, 2022).

On the social and cultural front, material borders can divide communities, separate families, and disrupt longstanding social and cultural connections. These barriers inhibit the natural social and economic interactions that typically occur in border regions, profoundly affecting the lives of those residing near these boundaries (Diener & Hagen, 2012).

Economically, while physical borders are designed to control illegal activities, they can also impede legal trade and movement. They may slow down the flow of goods and increase transportation costs due to delays at border crossings. However, they also create employment opportunities in security and border management, illustrating their complex economic impact (Diener & Hagen, 2022).

From a humanitarian perspective, walls and fences are often criticized for their implications, particularly when they prevent migrants and refugees from accessing safety or better

opportunities. These barriers can force individuals into more perilous routes, increasing the risk of injury or death (Diener & Hagen, 2022).

Contrasting with the tangibility of walls and fences are invisible borders, which, while not physically marked, are socially and economically significant. These include divisions within societies based on class, race, gender, and other identifiers that dictate access to power, mobility, and resources. Invisible borders shape interactions, determine social inclusion or exclusion, and impact individual identity and community cohesion.

Invisible borders are pervasive in everyday life, subtly influencing personal and collective experiences. They manifest in various settings, such as workplaces, schools, and public spaces, where social norms and institutional policies enforce the boundaries of acceptable behavior and interaction.

The materiality of borders, whether physical or invisible, plays a crucial role in shaping nations and influencing global dynamics. While walls and fences are critical for security and control, invisible borders govern social interactions and cultural exchanges. Both types of borders reflect and reinforce the complexities of modern societies, illustrating the multifaceted roles borders play in contemporary global affairs. Understanding these dynamics is essential for addressing the challenges and opportunities that borders present in an increasingly interconnected world.

borders extend beyond physical demarcations, influencing power dynamics, mobility, and a sense of belonging within societies. These invisible borders are socially constructed and can manifest in various ways, impacting individuals and communities differently (Diener & Hagen, 2022).

borders play a multifunctional role, not only in defining national territories but also in regulating movements and interactions within and across these borders (Diener & Hagen, 2012).

Regardless of the scale, it is clear that humans draw lines that divide the world into specific places, territories, and categories (Diener and Hagen 2012). most people cross hundreds of

geographic boundaries on a daily basis. Some are formal borders demarcating ownership or the limits of governmental authority, while others are symbolic or informal associations of places with social groups or ideas (Diener and Hagen 2012)

sociopolitical implications of borders, discusses how they can both protect and isolate. Borders can foster economic development and security within their confines but can also lead to conflict and exclusion, affecting international relations and internal cohesion. The authors discuss the dynamic nature of borders in today's globalized world, where the ease of information flow and economic interdependence conflicts with the traditional functions of borders (Diener and Hagen 2012)

borders as dividers of space, symbolic markers of control, and social processes of daily life. Reflecting their significance, borders have become a focus of study across the social sciences and humanities (Diener and Hagen 2012)

The primary function of geographic borders is to create and differentiate places. In other words, borders separate the social, political, economic, or cultural meanings of one geographic space from another. While the world is replete with various geographic boundaries, the institutional phenomenon of borders is most commonly associated with the idea of territory (Diener and Hagen 2012).

The process of creating territories requires some mode of territoriality. Territoriality is the means by which humans create, communicate, and control geographical spaces, either individually or through some social or political entity (Diener and Hagen 2012)

territorial control is not, nor has it ever been, the sole means by which humans enact political power. Countless forms of de-territorialized "authority" (the legitimate exercise of power) have existed throughout history and continue to exist today. Contemporary examples include various religious and social movements, as well as nongovernmental organizations relating to

environmentalism, human rights, and feminism that propagate their ideologies as universal and claim authority across space, class, and various forms of identity (Diener and Hagen 2012).

Borders are beyond physical demarcations and encompass social, economic, and cultural divisions that subtly dictate individual and collective experiences. Invisible borders are those that people navigate daily, often unconsciously, shaping interactions, access to resources, and societal participation. These can include class divisions, racial and ethnic boundaries, gender norms, and other socio-political constructs that segment societies internally (Diener and Hagen 2022).

Invisible borders influence power dynamics by determining who holds authority and privilege in various contexts, from local communities to global interactions. They affect mobility by controlling who can move freely within and between societies and under what conditions, influencing everything from migration to daily social mobility. In terms of belonging, these borders define in-groups and out-groups, thereby affecting individuals' sense of identity and acceptance within society (Diener and Hagen 2022).

Borders have profound symbolic and social impacts, shaping identities and experiences of inclusion or exclusion, confirming cultural authenticity while also acting as tools of oppression (Diener & Hagen, 2012).

Borders serve a multitude of functions that are essential to the organization and management of modern states and societies. These functions extend beyond territorial delineations, influencing economic policies, social structures, security measures, and cultural identities. Understanding the multifaceted roles of borders helps in appreciating their significance in global and local contexts. Here, we delve deeper into the various functions of borders, emphasizing their impact on sovereignty, security, trade, cultural preservation, and social dynamics.

One of the primary functions of borders is to delineate the territorial boundaries within which a state exercises sovereignty and enforces its governance. Sovereignty refers to the supreme

authority within a territory, encompassing the absolute right to govern, make laws, administer justice, and control state functions (Diener & Hagen, 2012). By clearly defining the geographical scope of governance, borders help maintain order and legal authority, ensuring that the governance mechanisms are effectively implemented within the recognized boundaries. This role is critical in the international system where the concept of state sovereignty is respected under international law, allowing states to operate independently and maintain their unique systems of governance.

Borders play a crucial role in ensuring national security. By monitoring and regulating who and what enters and exits a country, borders act as barriers against potential threats, including unauthorized immigration, smuggling, and the entry of contraband items (Diener & Hagen, 2022). In regions where geopolitical tensions prevail, borders are often heavily fortified and guarded to prevent conflicts and ensure the safety of the citizens within. The security function of borders is not only pivotal in warding off external threats but also in fostering a sense of safety and stability within the country.

Economic borders are instrumental in controlling the flow of goods and services across countries. They allow governments to implement trade policies, collect tariffs, and regulate market entry, which are essential for protecting domestic industries and managing economic activities (Diener & Hagen, 2012). Borders can create economic zones that differ in regulatory frameworks, encouraging investment and trade in specific areas. Moreover, economic borders help in countering illegal trade practices by enforcing customs regulations and standards.

Borders contribute significantly to the preservation of cultural heritage and the formation of national identities. By demarcating areas inhabited by particular ethnic or cultural groups, borders help maintain the uniqueness of cultural practices and languages (Diener & Hagen, 2022). In many cases, borders have been established to align with cultural or linguistic divisions, thus fostering a sense of community and belonging among the people within those borders. This



function is vital in a world where globalization poses challenges to cultural preservation, as it helps communities maintain their traditions and historical legacies.

Social borders, whether visible or invisible, regulate interactions among different groups within a society, influencing social cohesion and integration. These borders can be instrumental in creating inclusive societies by delineating areas that are diverse and open to various social groups (Diener & Hagen, 2012). Conversely, they can also lead to exclusion by segregating communities based on socio-economic status, race, or ethnicity. The dual role of borders in uniting and dividing people underscores the complexity of social dynamics and the need for thoughtful border management to enhance social harmony and equity.

Borders also play a critical role in environmental management by delineating zones where specific environmental laws and regulations apply. This function is particularly important in managing transboundary natural resources such as rivers, lakes, and mountain ranges, which require cooperative management between neighboring countries. Borders help in the implementation of agreements that aim to protect ecosystems and ensure the sustainable use of shared resources (Diener & Hagen, 2022).

In conclusion, the functions of borders are diverse and critical to the organization and operation of modern societies. From defining sovereign territories and enhancing security to regulating economic activities and preserving cultural identities, borders impact various aspects of life. Understanding these functions is essential in appreciating the importance of borders beyond their physical manifestations. As global dynamics evolve, the roles of borders are continually being redefined, reflecting the complexities of globalization, migration, and technological advancements. As such, borders remain a central topic in discussions about political geography, international relations, and global governance, shaping not only nations but also the experiences of individuals worldwide.

The link between boundaries and identity is complex. On the one hand, they appear to confirm and protect the authenticity of various cultural, ethnic, or religious identities, ensuring their continuity and security within the hosting country; on the other hand, they are prone to being tools of oppression and separation, sanctioning the exercise of power imbalances and limiting the fuller integration of minorities or marginalized populations into society.

The concept of belonging is deeply intertwined with boundaries and identity. Belonging relates to being accepted, respected, and included socially or physically. Borders may allow or hinder this process of belonging. The borders provide the enclave's minority a sense of protection and community. Conversely, there is a growing sense of isolation and separation from society.

In an era of migration and globalization, the notion of who belongs and who does not is ever-changing, and in most cases, it is submerged beyond national borders. Feeling like you belong will now be done through representations of identity, nation, and homeland and relationships of material power, wealth, and communication technology. Immigration laws are used to shape state (re)formation and create narratives of belonging and entitlement (Diener and Hagen 2022).

In short, the interaction of borders with identity and belonging raises critical questions not only about the borders themselves and the 'fluid' and 'porous' space surrounding them but also about how we define and negotiate our individual and collective identities, how to create spaces that strengthen social unity and integration, and how to manage both visible and invisible borders 'complexities of diversity, security, and place.'

borders are framed not just as physical realities but as pivotal elements in the socio-political landscape, capable of influencing a wide range of human activities and societal structures. They are depicted as constructs that both reflect and perpetuate power imbalances, facilitate or hinder movement, and shape senses of belonging, often in complex and contradictory ways.

borders or geographic boundaries reveal their socially constructed quality, and as a consequence of our capacity, we can use them, change them, or even abolish them (Diener and Hagen 2012)

## CHAPTER 9

### CASE STUDIES

Throughout history, several boundaries have shifted the world, including the Israel-Palestine border, the Mexico border, and the Berlin Wall and many other examples. During my investigation, I found five case studies. Each of these case studies provides great insights into my research topic, demonstrating how its design might help answer my thesis questions. By analyzing these examples, I can implement the methods applied to the case studies to inform and improve the design of my project.

#### 9.1 BERLIN WALL MEMORIAL



**Figure 15: Berlin Wall Memorial (Berlin Wall Memorial Foundation, n.d).**

The Berlin Wall Memorial was the winning entry of a 2007 competition by a team of architects, landscape designers, and exhibition designers - Mola + Winkelmüller, ON Architektur, and sinai. The memorial was constructed in phases, with the first section opening in 2011 and the 1.4 km

stretch along Bernauer Strasse which got completed in 2014. (Berlin Wall Memorial Foundation, n.d).

The Berlin Wall Memorial is a striking case study that captures the complexity of borders, identity, and belonging, as well as design's ability to approach these concerns skillfully. The Berlin Wall was an iconic and oppressive physical boundary of the twentieth century that separated East and West Berlin during the Cold War (Berlin Wall Memorial Foundation, n.d).. The memorial preserves remnants and traces of this border fortification, making the concept of borders tangible and experiential for visitors. It represents the sharp divide between the communist East and the capitalist West, as well as the exclusion and limitation of mobility for individuals residing on either side, demonstrating how borders can be tools of oppression, discrimination, and denial of basic rights (Berlin Wall Memorial Foundation, n.d).

The memorial also offers insight on the identity problems that came up as a result of the Berlin Wall's divisions. This enforced barrier split East and West Berliners' identities and sense of belonging, despite their shared history and culture, prompting study on how boundaries affect collective identities. The memorial's design is a carefully crafted narrative experience, allowing visitors to explore and reconstruct the history and events surrounding the border, demonstrating how design can communicate stories about borders.

The Berlin Wall Memorial contributes to the research by emphasizing the importance of boundaries in determining identity, belonging, and exclusion. Just as the Berlin Wall divided East and West Berliners, Iran's geographical limits have created tensions between the Muslim majority and other minorities, affecting their sense of identity and belonging. The memorial's architectural components, such as preserved fragments and geographical characteristics, may inspire design solutions that highlight the unseen barriers faced by the Armenian minority in Iran, promoting a greater understanding of their experiences.

Furthermore, the monument provides a space for inclusive recollection and collective healing, which is consistent with your goal of making use of design to build inclusive spaces that promote togetherness while valuing diversity. Analyzing how the memorial's design communicates narratives about boundaries may provide insights into using design as a medium to adjust borders and integrate areas while preserving the Armenian community's identity, variety, and feeling of place within the larger Iranian environment.

The design uses intact pieces of the original Berlin Wall and border fortifications as compelling reminders of the physical and intangible barriers that divided populations, making the notion of borders tangible and engaging.

It used design elements such as steel tracings, geographical characteristics, and open spaces to rebuild the history and tales of the boundary. It established a platform for an inclusive understanding of all victims of the divided border, allowing collective healing and fostering togetherness.

The eventual fall of the Berlin Wall highlights how even imposing physical borders can be temporary, prompting a critical examination of the role and impacts of borders across different eras.

## 9.2 A BORDER WALL AS ARCHITECTURE: A MANIFESTO FOR THE US-MEXICO BORDER.



**Figure 16: A series of sketches and pictures of the Mexico Border wall (Rael 2017).**

This theoretical manifesto by architect and professor Ronald Rael recommends redesigning the United States-Mexico border wall as a common environment that draws communities together rather than dividing them. It questions traditional beliefs about boundaries as dividing obstacles and investigates their possibilities as locations of cooperation and interaction.

Ronald Rael's manifesto, "A Border Wall as Architecture," offers a fresh vision for the United States-Mexico border wall. Instead of perceiving it as a barrier, he envisions it as a common area that connects both countries. He proposes transforming the border wall into a corridor with roads, services, and public amenities accessible to people from both the United States and Mexico. This design would make it easy for individuals to connect and interact across borders. (Rael 2017)

Rael also suggests building homes, businesses, and cultural facilities along this corridor to strengthen the economy and foster cultural exchange and connection among people on both sides.

Furthermore, he views the border wall's enormous length as a chance to benefit the environment. For example, segments of the wall may be used to create solar or wind energy or to collect and recycle water (Rael 2017).

Overall, Rael's vision is to transform the border wall from a symbol of conflict into a collaboration and partnership between the United States and Mexico. His approach would transform the wall into a space encouraging unity and growth.

The manifesto challenges the conventional perspective of borders as barriers, offering new architectural ideas that turn the border wall into a shared, productive, and sustainable place. It sees the border as an integration zone rather than a separating line where individuals can connect, share ideas, and engage in economic and cultural activities.

Rael's manifesto closely connects to my research since it proposes design solutions that use borders to interconnect locations while preserving identity. Just as the manifesto envisions the US-Mexico border wall as a shared corridor that facilitates cross-border interactions, my research will look into how design can change the visible and invisible borders that the Armenian community in Iran faces in order to promote integration while respecting their identity and diversity.

The manifesto emphasizes including cultural places and encouraging cultural interactions, which aligns with my design approach to building inclusive spaces that encourage unity. Analyzing the values offered in this manifesto may provide insights into how design may use boundaries to address the challenges of exclusion.

Furthermore, the manifesto's goal of changing the border wall into a hub for community collaboration aligns with what my research topic wants to achieve about how borders may be



used to promote interaction between communities. By examining this case study, I will look at design solutions that challenge conventional ideas of borders as divisive boundaries.

### 9.3 ENCLOSED GARDENS BY BEATE GÜTSCHOW



**Figure 18 and 19: BEATE GÜTSCHOW HC#4, C-print, 148 x 115 cm from the series “HC”, 2018, (Gütschow, 2019).**

Beate Gütschow, a contemporary German artist known for her photography, explores the subject of enclosed gardens in her series HC, Hortus Conclusus. This recurring subject in Renaissance and Medieval art displays walled or fenced green landscapes, representing peaceful, inaccessible places isolated from the outside world (Gütschow, 2019)

In HC, Hortus Conclusus, Gütschow captures the spirit of these gardens, stressing their solitude and isolation from their surroundings. Her images show carefully formed gardens surrounded by high walls, fences, or hedges, conveying an idealized and controlled scene. The intricate designs

and the placed plants within these spaces highlight their exclusivity and longing for an impeccable isolated environment apart from the unpredictability and uncertainty of life outside.

Gütschow's art invites viewers to consider these exclusive gardens' symbolic and figurative implications. They represent a need for order and control while also raising concerns about access, exclusion, and the borders that divide these areas from the larger community (Gütschow, 2019)

While Gütschow's Enclosed Gardens series may not have an immediate connection to the Armenian minority in Iran, it does serve as a metaphor for understanding the role of borders and limits in shaping ideas of walls and exclusion. Just as walled gardens represent hidden and private spaces, the geographical limitations faced by Iran's Armenian minority have led to a sense of isolation and limited interaction with the larger population. The walled sports complex in Tehran is a microcosm of these confined areas, illustrating the visible and invisible boundaries that define and restrict social connections.

Gütschow's work encourages thought on the physical and metaphorical consequences of such restricted places for access. Analyzing her images provides insight into how borders and limits produce a sense of exclusivity and isolation, adding to the intricacies of identity, diversity, and location in the context of my research. Furthermore, her analysis of these walled gardens' idealized and regulated character will help to influence future research into how design can use and adapt borders to interconnect areas inside and outside of an enclosed space.

This work encourages critical analysis of the function of borders in creating perceptions and experiences of the built world, revealing significant metaphorical and practical consequences of spatial division.

## 9.4 VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL BY MAYA LIN



**Figure 20: Images Provided by (VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL — MAYA LIN STUDIO, n.d.)**

Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., is an example of how architecture can address complicated questions of identity and collective memory. The memorial, built in 1982, recalls military members who fought in the Vietnam War, many of whom encountered considerable challenges upon their return (VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL — MAYA LIN STUDIO, n.d.).

The memorial's design is relatively basic yet immensely striking. It has two polished granite walls arranged in a V layout, with the names of almost 58,000 dead soldiers engraved into the black

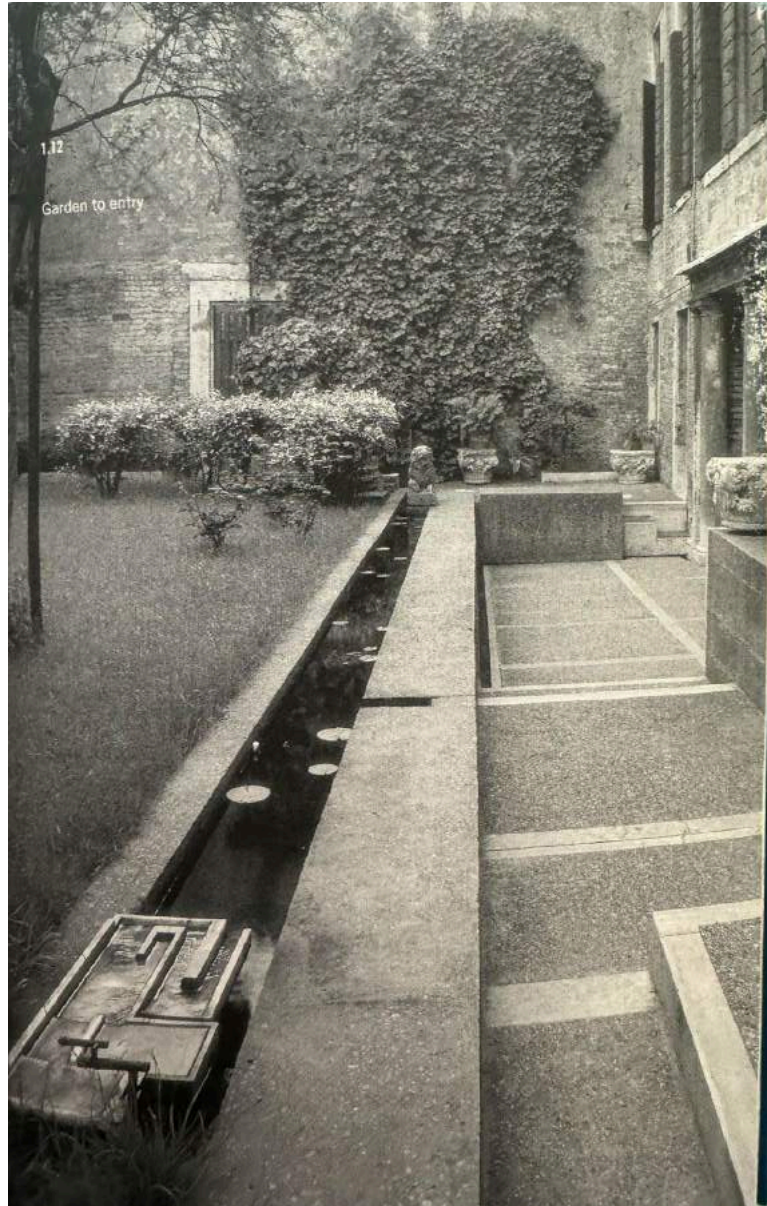
granite. These walls progressively sink into the earth, representing the journeys of the soldiers who went to Vietnam and returned. This descent and emergence generate a feeling of movement across the landscape, which is divided into two levels—effectively employing the design as a wall that creates a physical border and a metaphoric one, defining a space of reflection away from the real world (VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL — MAYA LIN STUDIO, n.d.).

The simple design avoids overt symbolism and glorification of war, allowing visitors to connect with the monument on a personal level (VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL — MAYA LIN STUDIO, n.d.). The granite walls' reflecting surfaces create a mirrored image, allowing visitors to view their reflections alongside the names of those who have died, creating a sense of connection.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, with its representation of societal limits and distinctions, is a relevant case study for my research on the Armenian community in Iran. Just as the Armenian church within Tehran's walled sports complex symbolizes geographical constraints and restrictions, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial represents societal boundaries and a lack of acceptance faced by returning veterans. This parallel underscores the universal nature of societal boundaries and their impact on different communities.

Maya Lin's design approach, which emphasizes simplicity, self-awareness, and personal interaction, sheds light on how design may build spaces that promote solidarity while honoring different points of view. This allows visitors to engage with the monument on an individual level, which bridges gaps and fosters a sense of shared belonging.

## 9.5 QUERINI STAMPALIA GARDEN BY CARLO SCARPA



**Figure 21: Querini Stampalia Garden, (Cadwell 2007).**

Carlo Scarpa's design for the Querini Stampalia Garden in Venice exemplifies how architectural interventions could tackle practical difficulties while generating a complex, multi-layered spatial experience. The garden, situated within the old Querini Stampalia Foundation, was commissioned

in the 1960s to solve flooding, an ongoing issue in Venice due to its unique geographical position (Cadwell 2007).

The site's history and setting profoundly influenced Scarpa's architectural approach. He used components like vegetation, water channels, and elevation differences to divide separate zones and create a sense of segregation or enclosure. These boundaries, however, were not rigid; instead, they were intended to allow for integration and fluidity, enabling visitors to walk smoothly between the garden's many regions (Cadwell 2007).

One of the garden's most noticeable aspects is its use of water as a design element. Scarpa designed a system of canals and ponds that manage flooding and enhance the garden's beauty and sensory experience. The sound of rushing water and the play of light on the water's surface creates a sense of peace and reflection (Cadwell 2007).

The garden's materials, such as brick, stone, and concrete, were diligently selected and professionally made, demonstrating Scarpa's keen eye for detail. The garden's design includes features of the surrounding Venetian architecture, providing a feeling of continuity and connection to the city's rich cultural legacy (Cadwell 2007).

Carlo Scarpa's Querini Stampalia Garden provides critical perspectives into my research on the function of design in constructing inclusive landscape. Scarpa's use of boundaries and levels within the garden space can be seen as a metaphor for the visible and invisible borders that outline and shape a space. Furthermore, the garden's use of water as a design feature and its solution to the practical worry of flooding may influence my research into how design might handle security concerns of practical worry.

## CHAPTER 10

### DESIGN PROCESS AND OUTCOME

For my project, I began with a detailed site analysis, focusing on the existing roads, green spaces, and potential locations for constructing a transparent wall near the chapel. This analysis helped identify strategic areas to integrate these elements effectively into the overall design



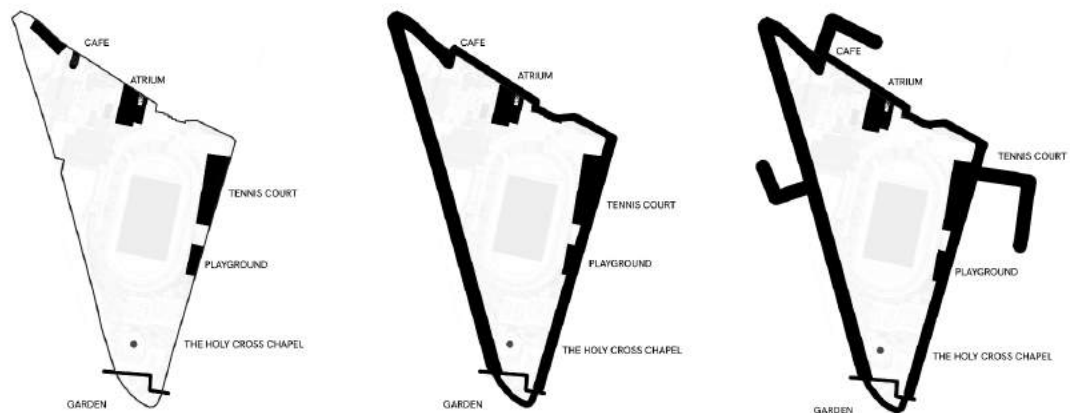
**Figure 22: Site Analysis, Ararat Sport Complex by Anita Ghorbani 2024**

My design process began with a comprehensive site analysis. The initial phase is depicted in the leftmost image, which illustrates traffic flow from surrounding routes and the main entrance to the site, with the chapel prominently highlighted in a pinkish hue. Due to the proximity of the highway, the main road connecting to the highway at the north end of the

site is likely to experience high density in terms of both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The route on the west side of the site, being less frequented, experiences minimal traffic.

The second analysis, positioned in the center, explores opportunities for creating openings in the walls based on the road analysis. Given the chapel's strategic position, the focus was predominantly on the walls surrounding it. I identified potential openings with circles near the chapel entrance and in various locations on the north and east sides, where higher population density due to traffic provides greater visibility.

In the third analysis, I highlighted the site's green spaces and proposed using vegetation as a visual shield in addition to the walls.



**Figure 23: A Diagram of Ararat Sport Complex by Anita Ghorbani 2024**

Subsequently, leveraging a site plan that outlines future developments for the Ararat complex, I selected several buildings near the wall—both existing and planned for future construction—to subtly modify and extend their programs. The roofs of these buildings were designed as platforms serving various functions for pedestrians, such as cafes,

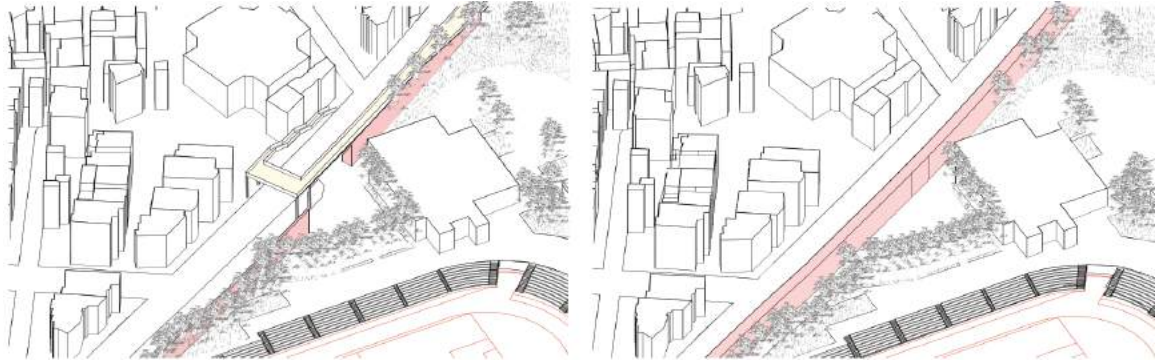


exhibition atriums, an open tennis court, playgrounds, and a garden adjacent to the chapel where Armenian artwork can be showcased. This concept was inspired by several case studies I analyzed.

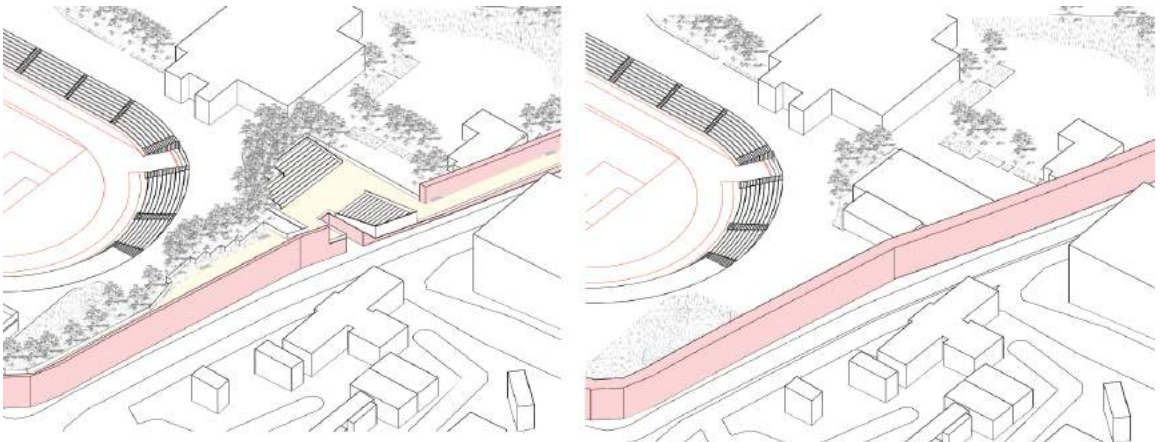
From a plan view in the subsequent diagrams, I illustrated how I integrated the building roofs, connecting them with walkways and providing access from the exterior. In additional sketches, I detailed how I reconfigured the wall in various segments, creating platforms and walkways that adjust in size, and introduced ramps and stairs to connect different levels. Importantly, to ensure privacy and security while maintaining visibility, I strategically used trees and other vegetation along with fences and smaller walls as boundaries.

A critical element of my design is the chapel, the focal point from which all design decisions radiate. Inspired by the Berlin Wall Memorial noted in my case studies, I first segmented the surrounding wall into larger sections which become progressively smaller with gaps as they near the chapel, enhancing visibility and prominence of this iconic Armenian structure. This approach not only respects the historical and cultural significance of the chapel but also integrates it thoughtfully into the surrounding landscape, creating a dynamic, multi-functional space that respects both heritage and modern utility.

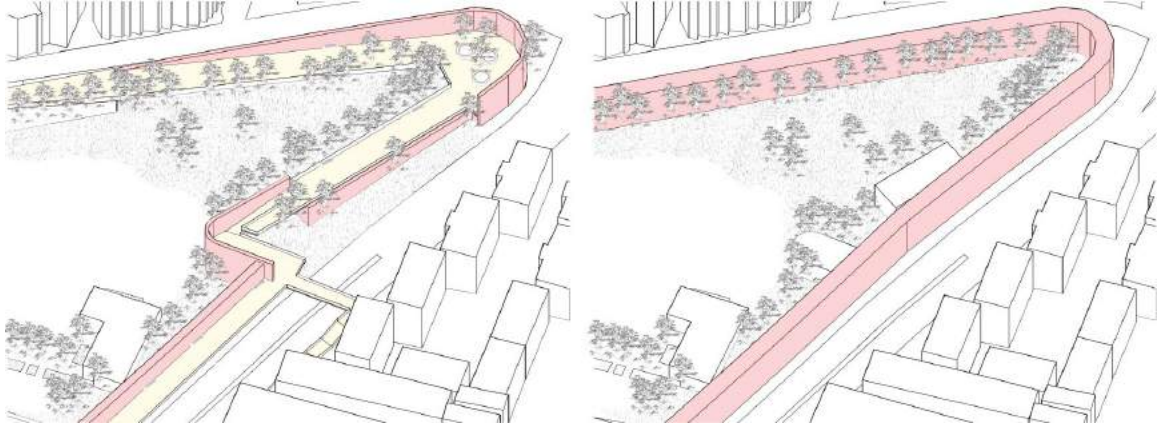
In the following sketches, I present the before and after comparisons of the wall designs at various locations within the Ararat Sports Complex.



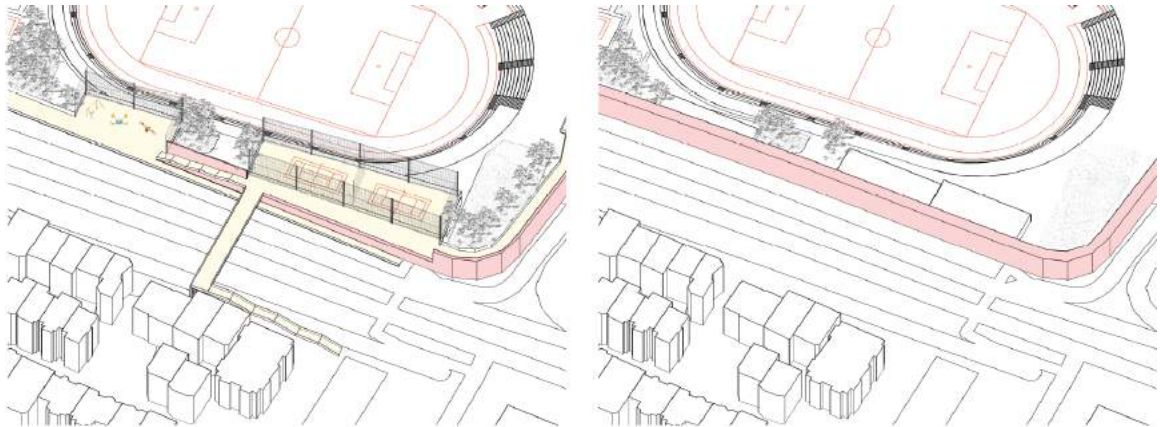
**Figure 24: Rendering showing Entrance before and after designing the wall by Anita Ghorbani 2024**



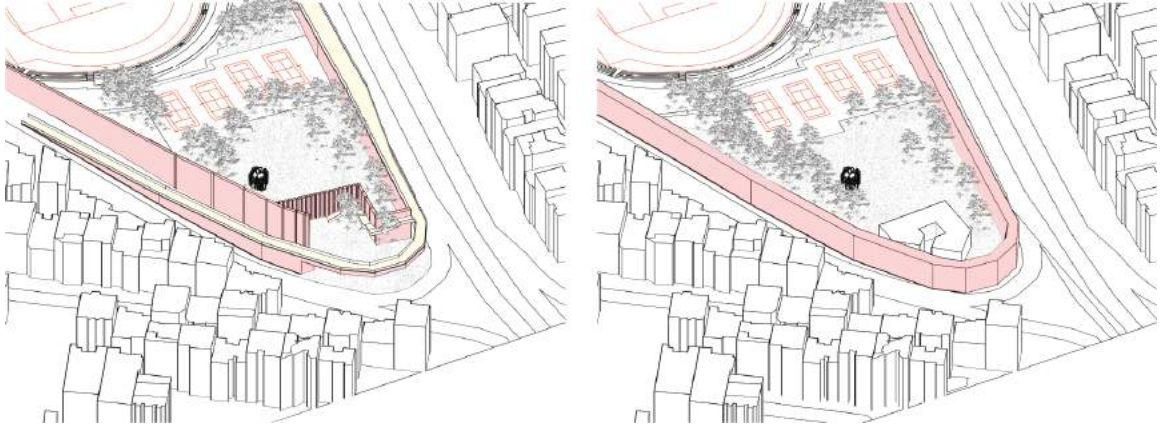
**Figure 26: Rendering showing Atrium before and after designing the wall by Anita Ghorbani 2024**



**Figure 27: Rendering showing Café and Park before and after designing the wall by Anita Ghorbani 2024**



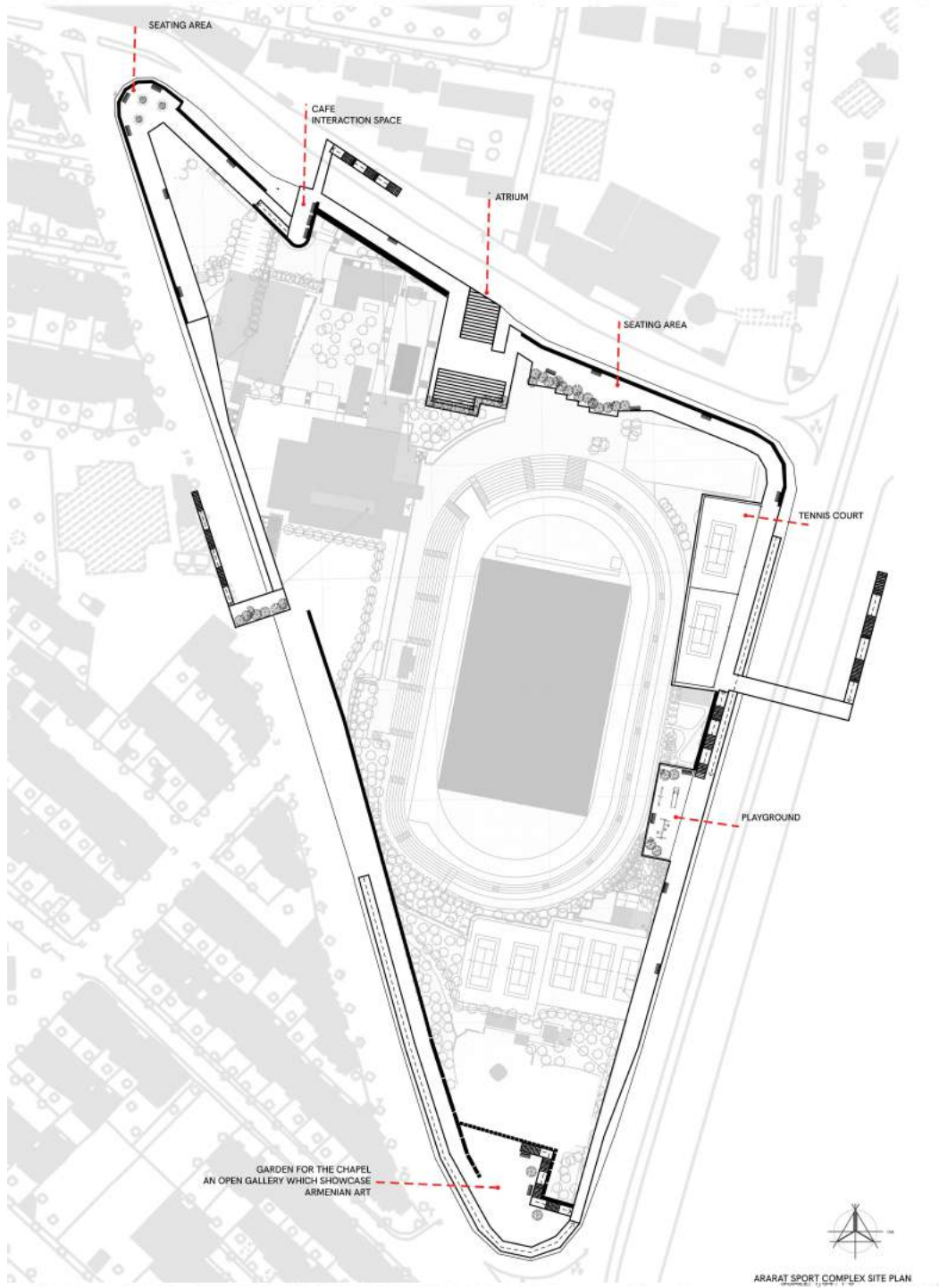
**Figure 28: Rendering showing Tennis Court and Playground before and after designing the wall by Anita Ghorbani 2024**



**Figure 29: Rendering showing the chapel and the garden before and after designing the wall by Anita Ghorbani 2024**



**Figure 30: Rendering showing the chapel and the garden before and after designing the wall by Anita Ghorbani 2024**



**Figure 31: Site plan by Anita Ghorbani 2024**

## CHAPTER 11

### CONCLUSION

The thesis "Invisible in Borders: Opening Up the Bubble of an Armenian Sports Complex in Tehran" showcases how architectural interventions can transform borders from barriers into connectors that not only enrich and integrate communities within urban landscapes but also act as a form of protest against oppression. Focused on the Holy Cross Chapel within the Ararat Sports Complex, this study shows the potential of design to enhance the visibility of the Armenian community, foster greater societal interaction, promote inclusivity, and subtly challenge governmental policies in a culturally diverse and politically complex urban setting like Tehran.

By incorporating semi-permeable elements and viewing platforms into the complex's architecture, the design proposals aim to invite curiosity and foster engagement from the broader public. This openness not only strengthens the community's identity by showcasing its rich heritage but also encourages a broader cultural dialogue essential for mutual understanding and respect. The visibility facilitated by these design choices is pivotal as it challenges prevailing stereotypes and fosters a more inclusive narrative within the urban fabric, while also serving as a silent protest against cultural marginalization enforced by dominant political ideologies.

The reconfiguration of the complex's walls to include accessible, communal areas strategically promotes interactions across cultural divides, turning the complex into a

vibrant hub of community activity. These interactions are crucial for breaking down the 'us versus them' mentality often associated with minority communities and for protesting the subtle forms of social segregation endorsed by official policies. By fostering such engagements, the architectural modifications proposed in this thesis advocate for a model of urban development that emphasizes connectivity over segregation, and resistance over acquiescence.

Moreover, this thesis underscores the importance of addressing both visible and invisible borders. By rethinking these borders through design, architects and planners can profoundly influence social dynamics, promoting a culture of inclusion and openness. The sensitivity to the dual nature of borders—as both physical and metaphorical barriers—is essential for creating spaces that genuinely reflect and accommodate diversity, and that also serve as counterpoints to governmental oppression.

The design principles articulated in this research offer scalable and adaptable strategies for urban planners and architects facing similar challenges in diverse settings. By promoting designs that facilitate visibility, interaction, and integration, urban spaces can evolve into more cohesive and harmonious environments that also embody the spirit of protest against unjust restrictions on cultural expression and community integration.

"Invisible in Borders" advocates for a transformative approach to urban design, where architecture acts not just as a physical structure but as a catalyst for social change and a platform for resistance. The Ararat Sports Complex, as reimagined through this research,

stands as a testament to the power of architecture to foster community pride, cross-cultural understanding, cooperation, and a subtle yet powerful form of protest against the oppressive elements within Iranian governance. This vision for future urban development, grounded in respect for diversity and a commitment to inclusivity, offers a hopeful and practical blueprint for architects and urban planners aiming to create more inclusive cities worldwide. This dual role of architecture as both an integrator and a resistor enriches the discourse on how built environments can shape and redefine societal norms and political landscapes.



**Figure 32: A collage showing the visible wall in front of the Holy Corss Chapel by  
Anita Ghorbani 2024**



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