



lated chord was struck in comments made about the importance of committed clients, patrons, and donors in Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Institutions were regarded more as constraints on design, whether in California or Iran, than as part of the creative domain of design. Examples were given of bureaucratic behaviour and regulations that retarded shifts toward more sustainable landscape practices. The two case studies in Iran prompted comments about the impact of radical changes in political institutions on landscape design - the park in Tehran is noteworthy in that it thrived both before and after the revolution, which led to discussions of the cultural bases of arid zone landscape design.

### **Cultural Dimensions of Landscape Sustainability**

The two major cultural themes concerned “difference” and “universals”, again both in the context of Iran. Some argued that the sustainable use of “public”, “community”, and “private” spaces (which proved to be unsatisfactory terms) were fundamentally different in Iran than in the West, while others raised questions and qualifications. The suc-

DEVELOPMENT OF AL-AZHAR PARK, MANAGED BY AGA KHAN CULTURAL SERVICES – EGYPT, IS ACCOMPANIED BY IN-DEPTH STUDIES OF THE URBAN FABRIC AROUND THE SITE.

“ THE MOST COMMON VIEWS OF  
NATURE FOR THIS GROUP WERE  
EXPLICITLY LINKED WITH IDEAS  
ABOUT SOCIETY AND CULTURE. ”

cess of the Tehran park project before and after the revolution, however, led to a proposition by Dr. Mina Marefat that it may have achieved something of universal significance by speaking to basic human yearnings.

The idea of a common humanity recalled one of Ismail Serageldin’s principal themes, and it was repeated in the Saudi Arabian case study where a “human love of desert and trees” was said to account for the success of the Diplomatic Quarter landscape design outside Riyadh. When the discussion turned to Riyadh itself, however, participants questioned its coherence and sustainability.

### **Varieties of “Naturalism” in Arid Landscape Design**

At the very start of the roundtable, a question was raised about the meaning of “nature” in arid environments. Although not taken up systematically, this question reappeared under each of the broad headings discussed above. Some participants stressed the role of natural technologies (i.e., those which employ or emulate natural materials and processes) while others were satisfied with a naturalistic appearance or allusions to nature in modern design and construction technologies. None of the participants in the group argued for strictly “native” plantings.

Indeed, it seems significant that the most common views of nature for this group were explicitly linked with ideas about society and culture. The basic human yearnings in Tehran noted above are viewed as natural desires; the principles of regenerative design and desert landscape forms are jointly social and natural; sand dune stabilisation in the Sudan integrates ecological and social adjustments of and to the environment; and the Diplomatic Quarter in Saudi Arabia brings together a love of deserts and oases.