

DEVELOPING A CRITERIA FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATION OF THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT PLANS IN IRAN: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

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Abstract:

This article discusses the conceptual requirements in preparing an evaluation framework for the urban development plans in Iran as well as modifies the evaluation criteria proposed in previous studies. Although applying a highly refined evaluation framework for assessing the quality of urban development plans can increase the efficiency of the development process, employing an unmodified framework in a specific urban context may negatively affect the development process because of exclusive conditions. An evaluation framework based on the worldwide experiences cannot normally be employed in the evaluation of the urban development plans of Iran. Hence, this research contributes to the advancement of a more adaptable evaluation framework for evaluation in four parts. These parts include (i) the examination of the urban development process of Iran; (ii) the extraction of a general evaluation framework from different studies and worldwide experiences; (iii) the analysis of the effective elements for the urban development plans of Iran through SWOT analysis; and (iv) the generation of an evaluation framework based on a preliminary analysis of the specific situation of the urban development plans of Iran.

Keywords: Urban development plan, evaluation framework, comprehensive planning, SWOT analysis, Iran

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INTRODUCTION

The UN forecasts that the total urban population will increase from 3.3 billion in 2007 to 6.3 billion in 2050, and a large proportion of this growth will only occur in developing countries (UN-Habitat, 2009). Despite the acceleration of the growth of cities, developing countries experience the negative effects of urbanization, such as increase in informal settlements and frequency of traffic jams, and shortage in housing and other resources (Atash, 2007). Governments have addressed issues on uncontrolled urban growth and unplanned migrations as the demand for urban land continues to increase tremendously (Doogun, 2009). Several countries have proposed their respective urban plans during the second half of the 20th century to solve the abovementioned issues (Weng, 2007). However, the recently proposed methods and techniques are inadequate in solving urban problems and in addressing the demands of city residents, especially those in developing countries, as reflected in the continuous prevalence of environmental issues, increase of pollution, and expansion of slum areas.

As a developing country in Southwest Asia, Iran has experienced rapid urbanization over the last six decades (Rafiee *et al.*, 2009). The uncontrolled urban growth and the expansion of informal settlements within and outside of the city boundaries reflect the inefficiency of the current urban development plans in the country (Maghsoodi Tilaki *et al.*, 2011). Although evaluation process in urban development plans primarily promote a highly efficient urban land control system, this function has been neglected in the Iranian context. While studies have focused on the quality of urban development plans in Iran, an evaluation framework for such plans has yet to be proposed. This study bridges the gap between the quality of urban development plans and the integrated criteria evaluation framework. The findings can help authorities to examine the quality of urban development plans, understand the defects and barriers in the implementation of such plans, and improve urban development process in Iranian cities.

Urban Planning In Iran

Over the last decades, Iran has been experiencing rapid urbanization (Fanni, 2006). However, after the Second World War, the economic system has depended on oil and the centralization of national management has increased (Madanipour, 1999). This dependency is due to the absence of appropriate infrastructure in the rural areas and the industrialization and modernization efforts during the Pahlavi dynasty from 1942 to 1979 (Seelig, 2011).

During the urbanization of the country, Iranian authorities neglected several opportunities, such as the development of agricultural and conversion industries

(Ferdowsian, 2002). Several policies in 1962, such as modernization and land reform, have encouraged rural migration to major cities because of the defective infrastructure and facilities in rural areas (Madanipour, 2006; Najmabadi, 1987). Since 1948, the Iranian government has focused on national planning, particularly on the construction of additional infrastructures, such as electricity networks and water piping systems (Saraf, 1999). These urban issues were specifically addressed in the third national plan (1963 to 1967), and foreign consultant engineers have been employed by the Iranian government to prepare the first guidance plans in the second national plan (1955 to 1962). The initial urban development plans have been developed in 1964 through a comprehensive planning method, and the uncontrolled developments have resulted in major physical and social defects among Iranian cities (Ziari, 2006).

The fourth national development plan (1968 to 1972) focused on improving urban management and development, whereas the fifth national development plan (1973 to 1978) drew away because of the inflation of oil revenue, which reached more than USD 20 billion in 1977 from USD 482 million in 1964 (Razzagi, 1988). Iranian authorities have lessened urban development programs after certain events, such as the Islamic revolution (1978) and the Iraqi war (1979). These events resulted in changes in the Iranian government structure (Madanipour, 2006) as well as the political, economic, cultural, demographic, and social structures of Iranian cities (Modarres, 2006).

Different paradigms from developed countries replaced the comprehensive planning approach when Iran retained the comprehensive planning approach as a basic method in different processes of urban planning (Seelig, 2011). While most modern countries have experienced various occurrences because of the urban planning system after the 70s, the urban planning process of Iran was unable to design and to build cities to address the needs and shortages. The lack of upgrading in the urban planning system in Iran may have been caused by the disorganization of the executive and the provisional mechanisms of the government from the Islamic revolution during the 70s.

While government faced major financial challenges due to economic recession and war, government organizations earned their income from service fees, which caused urban management to seek commercial profits in their activities in the urban fabrics (Azizi, 1995; Kamrava, 2007). The municipalities attempted to find new financial resources, which have resulted in fine developers instead of the demolitions of illegally constructed buildings. Gaining huge profits from this method since the 90s (Saeednia, 1999) has encouraged municipalities to continue the practice of collecting fees.

Iranians have yet to witness a considerable transformation in their environment as the urban

development plans of the country are still being prepared through a comprehensive planning method. The migration of rural residents to urban areas has negatively affected the distribution of urban land, which has subsequently increased housing demands, unemployment rates, and traffic jams in the cities. The demand for additional urban infrastructure has become a concern of both the government and of the people (Modarres, 2006). Inefficient urban management and inadequate land control policies have developed the physical expansion of Iranian cities over the past decades (Fanni, 2006).

While the government attempted to develop cities by means of the urban development plans, Iranian cities have met various major consequences over the last six decades due to rapid urbanization and inefficiency of urban governance. Subsequently, the urban development plans of Iranian cities are reviewed to reveal the factors that influence the inefficiencies. These factors can be helpful in the evaluation process of urban development plans.

Inefficiency of Urban Planning System

The urban development plans and their components have been prepared based on the comprehensive planning approach in Iranian cities. The consequences of the implementation of urban development plans revealed a sizeable difference between plan forecasting and the achievement of results among countries, such as Iran. A review of the studies indicated that reasons focused on major elements that have considerably affected the urban development process, as indicated in the following three subsections.

Preparation of Urban Development Plans

The comprehensive planning approach is based on functionalism theory. Given their substantial limitations, most urban development plans in Iran considered the physical aspects of cities (Iran's Ministry of Country, 2000). Therefore, urban planning was reduced to physical planning, which did not consider social and cultural factors (Sharmand, 2003). The preparation of physical plans is disconnected from the upper and lower levels of planning (such as the national socio-economic development plan as well as other improvement and renovation plans) (Panahandeh Khah *et al.*, 2009). Because urban development plans cannot be prepared based on the major government policies at the urban level, these plans may not be in line with the planning decisions that are made at other levels. The targets of urban development plans are influenced by the decisions of political authorities on such plans (Mozayyani, 1999). The implementation of inappropriate regulations, such as fixed building

density, prevents these plans from satisfying the demands of citizens. Plans are prepared without completely investigating the economic effects on the urban land market, which reflects the inefficient implementation of such plans. Moreover, the decision-making processes of planning authorities are not classified in the urban development process. Different organizations, institutions, and urban managements do not coordinate with each other in the development of such plans because of unclear regulations on their preparation (Ghamami, 1999). Public opinion was also not considered in the preparation of these plans (Mashhoudi, 2001).

The government enters into a contract with the private sectors (urban planning consultant companies) to prepare development plans based on a homologous agreement, such as Agreement Twelve. This agreement is a typical agreement for Iranian cities, and is considered as a preparation framework in preparing such plans, but the contract has major defects in the preparation process (Nourian, 2002; Panahandeh Khah *et al.*, 2009). Although several countries transform their preparation process of the urban development plans every few years, the preparation process in Iran has not been conceptually upgraded during the past years.

Pre-Approval of Urban Development Plans

Urban development plans have been prepared to achieve specific targets in line with the strategies of the central government. Instructions of the central government are fully implemented in the preparation and approval processes (Iran's Ministry of Country, 2000; Nourian, 2002). However, the requests and facilities of municipalities are not necessarily considered in these processes because such plans are linear top-down. Hence, the centralization of the government system had made the approval process time-consuming (Saeednia, 1999). Plans and strategies were also not updated. Municipalities did not have a direct role in the approval process, whereas provincial authorities were primarily responsible for this process (Panahandeh Khah *et al.*, 2009). People were not involved in the approval process, and thus, the process neglected their demands and opinions (Barati, 2006).

The revision and approval processes of the urban development plans are not based on an integrated system. For example, urban authorities (city council and municipality) and professional institutions do not have a role in the revision and approval processes. Plans undergo revisions and approval from several levels of the government over a long period (Iran's Ministry of Country, 2000; Nourian, 2002). Another defect is the lack of clarity in urban development plans (Iran's Ministry of Country, 2000), and thus plans are revised and approved without comprehensive regulations during the process. Therefore, functional goals of the plans can

be changed even in the final meeting of the approval process (Iran's Ministry of Country, 2000). The lack of comprehensive laws and parallel regulations has caused the urban development plans to not have effective links with regional and national plans (Majedi, 2001).

Implementation of Urban Development Plans

The structure of Iranian government is that of a centralized government, which has affected authorities in the implementation of the urban development plans. The lack of coordination among the different organizations in the urban planning process is due to the absence of comprehensive urban planning Acts, laws, and regulations (Majedi, 2001; Nourian, 2002; Zamani & Arefi, 2012). Therefore, urban management is ineffective in terms of the existence of urban authorities, as municipalities are not exclusively involved in the management of urban matters. Subsequently, various bureaus and organizations at the provincial or urban levels may restrict the functions of the municipalities in the implementation of urban development process in terms of their legal responsibilities and the lack of appropriate horizontal coordination among these municipalities and other organizations (Zamani & Arefi, 2012).

Based on these conditions, urban management in developing countries necessitates strengthening the government and other actors, such as NGOs, in the urban management process (McGill, 1998). For instance, ownership rights and authorities who undertake urban land matters have been obligated to different institutions, organizations, and councils, such as Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Urban Land Organization, Documents Registration Office, and Organization of Natural Resources. These overlapping responsibilities have decreased the power of urban governance (Zamani & Arefi, 2012).

The lack of financial and human resources hinder municipalities from participating in the implementation process (Panahandeh Khah *et al.*, 2009). In practice, the private sectors and the NGOs have no participation in the implementation process (Nourian, 2002), which makes the implementation of the urban development plans impossible at the level of municipalities. Moreover, the multiplicity Acts and regulations in the urban planning system of Iran have caused confusion in the implementation of the urban development plans (Sharmand, 2003).

Another difficulty arises when the implementation process is extremely affected by the land market, which has resulted in negative private and public benefits because of the lack of qualified Acts in the cities (Tavakoli, 2001). Generally, physical and functionalistic views of the current urban planning approach have degraded the goals of Iran's urban development plans for land use determination. Fixed land use maps and

criteria tables are major productions of current urban development plans by considering physical expansion of cities. From another point of view, the lack of an integrated urban planning system, such as laws, regulations, and policies for land use planning, has caused social, economic, and legal problems for implementation of urban development plans. This lack has contributed to deficiencies in urban management and slower structural growth in cities. However, the urban development plans of Iran can be improved according to some functions and the review of the experiences of other countries. The review suggested that urban planning system should lead towards more public participation, flexibility, social integration, less attention to social class, and fewer direct government intervention through appropriate Acts, extensive coordination, and effective urban management.

Necessity for Evaluation of Urban Plans

Urban development plans are implemented to control the distribution of urban land and to manage the urban development process (Wong, 2006). Governments must evaluate the quality of these plans to identify their urban management shortcomings. Many studies have attributed the inefficiency of urban development plans to the centralized governments, inefficient urban planning methods, inflexible administrative mechanisms, ineffective legislations, and inappropriate urban development strategies (Amos, 1986; Azizi, 1998; Stevens, 2013).

Developed countries have begun to employ evaluation process since the second half of the 20th century to improve the efficiency of their urban development plans (Mu, 2006; Rossiter, 1996). The evaluation of urban land governance has been neglected in almost all developing countries through the implementation of urban development plans (UN-Habitat, 2009). Therefore, in developing countries, particularly Iran, the evaluation of urban development plans is needed to determine the inefficiencies of such plans and to improve their urban land control methods, strategies, and tools. The results of the evaluation can subsequently enhance the sustainability of urban development and improve the quality of life in the cities. Hence, an evaluation framework that is highly compatible with the Iranian urban planning system must be developed. A preliminary evaluation framework is constructed in this study by reviewing international studies and reports on urban planning.

Conceptual Framework for Plan Quality

The evaluation of an urban development plan requires a definite framework with classified criteria that reflect the capability and credibility of the plan. The

preliminary conceptual framework determines the quality of a plan based on several distinctive features that are critical to the successful implementation of plans and to the achievement of goals (Stevens, 2013).

Given the significance of the evaluation criteria on improving the efficiency of urban development plans (Li *et al.*, 2009), several scholars and organizations (Baer, 1997; Brody, 2003; Europe Aid, 2006; Nelson & French 2002; UNDP, 2001; World Bank, 1999) have developed their respective evaluation frameworks. This study merges several evaluation frameworks of other studies (such as Baer, 1997; Brody, 2003; Europe Aid, 2006; Nelson & French, 2002; UNDP, 2001; World Bank, 1998) to create a preliminary evaluation framework. The criteria are described as follows:

Relevance: This criterion examines each product or activity and its usefulness to society. In this case, the plans are assessed in terms of their missions and the demands of cities.

Feasibility: This criterion assesses the plan capability for implementation. This step considers different areas, such as financial, technical, and legal capacities.

Adequacy of the method: This criterion analyzes the efficiency of methods that are presented in urban development plans as well as the utilization of available data and resources. This criterion uses efficiency and data approaches to evaluate the data and methods of the plans.

Coherence (adequacy of scope): This criterion investigates how the plan can be related to a larger environment. Urban development plans must be coherent and relevant to other plans and policies.

Plan format: The formulation of the plan should be handled by professionals. Subsequently, these plans must be clear enough to be readable and understandable by stakeholders, such as the people, developers, municipal authorities, regional agencies, and urban planners.

Impact: The implementation of the plan should obtain appropriate results. Thus, this criterion attempts to identify the effectiveness of the plans in achieving desired results.

Although these criteria have been extensively used to assess urban development plans in different contexts, the preliminary criteria must be developed further by including additional criterion(s) that can fit the Iranian context amid the different situations and government structures of the country (Li *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, primary data are collected before developing the evaluation framework.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

This study adopts a qualitative method to explore the ability of the criteria evaluation framework to review the Iranian urban development plans. A qualitative method is selected for its capability to provide a realistic image (Chisnall, 1997). This approach is most appropriate for studies that focus on human occurrences, configuration of strategies, and assessment of plans or policies (Polkinghome, 1991).

Research Design

The first part of this paper provides a brief review of studies on Iranian urban development plans by describing the evolution of the Iranian urban planning system. The second part describes the proposed conceptual framework that can evaluate the quality of plans based on the urban development experiences in other contexts. A preliminary criteria evaluation framework with six major criteria is created in this study. This framework is modified further to fit the urban planning and governance contexts of Iran.

The primary data are analyzed to identify the features of the plan that are critical to successful implementation and achievement of goals in Iranian cities. The SWOT technique is employed to recognize critical features after the qualitative data analysis of interview transcripts was conducted with NVivo software. While the weak components of the urban development plans are identified within the evaluation framework development, the new critical criteria are added to the evaluation framework in this section. Finally, the research findings are discussed, and the implications are based on the empirical research.

Data Collection

The collected data are classified into primary and secondary data. The primary data are obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 26 urban planners. Six interviewees are supervision and legislation experts, 10 interviewees are plan developers, and 10 interviewees are stakeholders from city councils and municipalities. The interviewees were selected based on their experiences with urban development plans. Given that all cities in Iran follow the same preparation and approval processes for urban development plans, the interviewees are recruited from six major Iranian cities, namely, Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz, and Karaj. Aside from providing additional evidence on the critical features of urban development plans, the interviewees were asked 11 questions that belonged to 5 major categories, namely, context, legislation, feasibility, method, and impact. Normally, the interviews lasted for 2.5 hours, and were recorded with an electronic device. The

primary data assisted in the development of the criteria evaluation framework.

Secondary data were collected from international organizations, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), World Bank, and Europe Aid. These data reviewed the preparation and implementation processes of urban development plans in Iranian cities as well as the participation of several Iranian authorities and the public sector in urban planning.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data used in this research comprised primary data from interviews 26 stakeholders in the Iranian urban planning system. These resource persons are experts in supervision, urban planners from companies, and urban planners from municipalities. NVivo 9 was used to analyze the qualitative data by content analysis and cognitive mapping techniques. Content analysis was employed to identify the concepts through developing codes. Concept associations were revealed by cognitive mapping to clarify the visual perception in this research. The collected data were coded according to thematic headings after the transcripts were encoded into the NVivo 9.

Development of an Evaluation Framework

The preliminary evaluation framework was created by reviewing the literature on urban development. Several studies argue that an evaluation framework is usually identified at a certain level (Alexander & Faludi, 1998; Baer, 1997). The evaluation process determined the criteria that were directly related to the objectives of the evaluation. However, the preliminary evaluation framework could not be used to evaluate Iranian urban development plans, as this framework did not consider the exclusive critical features of Iran. The preliminary evaluation framework is developed through primary data analysis to address the research objective. The SWOT technique is employed to classify the factors for further evaluation after the content analysis of the transcript.

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis assesses the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of a project or a plan that considers both the internal and external aspects of systems (Chillemi, 2006; UNDP, 2007). This study performed the SWOT technique for validation and improvement of preliminary evaluation criteria in terms of the specific features of the urban development plans in Iranian cities. The data were obtained from the semi-structured 26 interviews.

The strength of the current policies is that both national and regional authorities are involved in creating urban development plans and in promoting urban

management. The weakness of such policies is the non-inclusion of stakeholders in the preparation and the implementation of urban development plans. City residents who are exposed to the negative outcomes of urban development did not participate in these processes. The non-participation can be attributed to several reasons, such as lack of legal status and disinterest among authorities. Moreover, there is no built-in coordinating dynamism in the urban planning process, urban development plans, and enough flexibility for developers in the implementation of urban plans.

The inflexibility of urban plans can influence the urban development process, social acceptability, and the reduction in investment security. The following two statements indicate the weaknesses of urban development plans:

- (i) Employed methods in the preparation, approval, and implementation process of urban development plans are inadequate.
- (ii) Lack of relevance exists between defects and the presented solutions in urban development plans.

In addition, two opportunities surrounding the urban development plan process are as follows:

- (i) Urban development plans can be improved by involving the public in the urban development process. However, determining an appropriate level of public participation may take some time. Such opportunity can encourage local people to disclose their actual demands.
- (ii) Reducing the population growth rate can improve the efficiency of development plans by reducing urban land demand and inflation. This opportunity can help urban development plans achieve the desired outcomes.

The following three threats can reduce the positive effects of urban development plans:

- (i) Conflicts among relevant institutions can hinder the implementation of urban development plans.
- (ii) The critical issues are intensified, whereas plurality Acts consider municipality authorities as threats in urban development plans.
- (iii) The lack of financial resources for urban development can hinder the implementation of urban development plans. Municipalities transform their activities in such a way that they can generate additional income and instantly obtain urban development controls through the implementation of urban development plans.

However, the abovementioned factors can influence the implementation of urban development plans in Iranian

cities from both internal and external aspects. These aspects should be considered in the evaluation framework development.

Proposed Evaluation Framework

Both internal and external elements may affect urban development plans. The present study developed the evaluation framework by considering the combination of the most critical urban plans features. The SWOT analysis verified the following criteria:

- (i) The consideration of sustainability and feasibility in the implementation of urban development plans should include financial, technical, and legal factors.
- (ii) The preparation of the urban development plans with more efficiency, and the plan details should clarify the methodology.
- (iii) The connections between the upper and lower

levels of plans in the urban development plans should be more efficient during the preparation and the implementation process of urban development plans.

Public participation as a critical feature can be added to the evaluation framework because of the exclusiveness of urban development plans in Iranian cities. **Table 1** shows the conclusive criteria with their respective components. These criteria are derived from several indicators that have been identified from the literature. The second column of **Table 1** indicates the respective indicators of each criterion, and the third column shows their respective qualitative evaluation levels. As each indicator must follow a certain target in the evaluation process, a question is developed for each indicator to achieve evaluation targets. The last two columns of **Table 1** show the evaluation targets and the respective questions of the indicators. The framework is classified into seven items after considering all concerns in the urban development plans.

Table 1. The framework for quality evaluation of urban development plans in Iran's urban planning

Criteria Classification	Indicators	Criterion	Evaluation Targets	Major Question
Relevance of urban development plans	Ability to recognize the problems, requirements, sources, and opportunities based on the municipalities capacities.	High: very capable Moderate: fairly capable Low: incapable	To assess consideration to specific strengths and weaknesses in cities by urban development plans in preparation process	How city features including strengths and weaknesses are considered in urban development plans' preparation?
	Preparing urban development plans based on the reliable data	High: very reliable Moderate: fairly reliable Low: unreliable	To verify validity of data sources which are used in preparing urban development plans	What are the sources used in the process of urban development plans?
	Capability to coordinate between urban development plans and related plans in different levels of spatial planning	High: very coordinated Moderate: Fairly coordinated Low: uncoordinated	To determine compatibility among urban development plans at different levels of spatial planning	How is the compatibility among urban development plans at different levels of spatial planning?
Feasibility of urban development plans	Compatibility of laws to adapt urban development plans to social requirements	High: very compatible Moderate: fairly compatible Low: incompatible	To determine the adaptation level of urban development plans with people requirements regarding current legal status	Can current legal statuses adapt outputs of urban development plans and people requirements?
	Coordination in administrative system and municipalities for approval and implementation of urban development plans	High: very coordinated Moderate: fairly coordinated Low: uncoordinated	To verify effective relationship among current administrative system and municipalities for approval & implementation process of urban development plans	How do the administration system and municipalities have effective compatibility for approval and implementation of urban development plans?

Criteria Classification	Indicators	Criterion	Evaluation Targets	Major Question
	Appropriate financial resources to secure capital or funding for implementation of plans	High: very feasible Moderate: fairly feasible Low: unfeasible	To determine appropriate achievable financial resources to supply implementation of urban development plans	What are the financial resources for the implementation of urban development plans? Are these achievable?
	Executive power and obligatory aspect of plans	High: very enforced Moderate: fairly enforced Low: unenforced	To assess level of focus attention on implementation for urban development plans	How is the implementation of urban development plans emphasized?
Impact of urban development plans	People's satisfaction after implementation of urban development plans	High: very large Moderate: fairly large Low: meager	To examine implementation effects of urban development plans in people's attitudes	How are the implemented urban development plans?
	Contradiction between suggestions & implementations of urban development plans	High: very large Moderate: fairly large Low: meager	To determine contradiction levels from suggestions in implementation of urban development plans	What is the adaptation between suggestions and implemented urban development plans?
	Impacts of urban development plans in expansion of public trust & encouraging collaboration among stakeholders	High: very consistent Moderate: fairly consistent Low: inconsistent	To examine role of the of urban development plans in expansion of public trust & encouraging collaboration among stakeholders	What are the impacts of urban development plans on the expansion of public trust and encouraging collaboration?
Coherence	Urban development plans are able to present goals, roles, and functions consistently.	High: very consistent Moderate: fairly consistent Low: inconsistent	To assess the connection between components of urban development plans including goals, roles, and functions	How are goals, roles, and functions of urban development plans compatible?
Adequacy of approach	Preparing of policies based on the flexible approaches in different stages(objectives, data collection, analysis, discussion)	High: very flexible Moderate: fairly flexibility Low: inflexible	To examine the employment of various approaches to improve efficiency process of urban development plans	What are different approaches involved in preparing urban development plans to provide more efficiency?
Format of plans	urban development plans are designed based on scientific methods	High: very able Moderate: fairly able Low: unable	To determine the use of scientific methods and their efficiency in the process of preparation of urban development plans	Are the scientific methods utilized in the preparation of urban development plans efficient?
	Results of urban development plans are presented by clear documents and maps	High: very clear Moderate: fairly clear Low: unclear	To examine recognition level in outputs of urban development plans including documents and maps.	How do the documents and maps as outputs describe results and process of urban development plans?
Public Participation	Actual participation of local people in preparation and	High: very large Moderate:	To examine effective actions of people in preparation and	How effective are the actions in getting people to participate in

Criteria Classification	Indicators	Criterion	Evaluation Targets	Major Question
	approval process of urban development plans	fairly large Low: meager	approval process of urban development plans	the preparation and approval process of urban development plans?

RESULTS

To date, investigation regarding the quality of urban development plans in Iranian cities is limited. Therefore, the development of a more refined and intention approach is needed. The literature review revealed three aspects in the evaluation framework for urban development plans, namely social, economic, and environment. The preliminary evaluation framework included six principal components, which are *relevance of plans, feasibility of plans, effect of plans, coherence of plans, adequacy of approach, and format of plans*, which were all extracted and named based on their intuitive concept. The SWOT analysis identified one strength, four weaknesses, two opportunities, and three threats from the current urban planning situation in Iranian cities. The analysis supported that public participation must be added as an additional component of the evaluation framework.

The SWOT analysis results also showed that the preliminary evaluation framework has limited suitability in evaluating urban development plans in Iran. While the evaluation framework may be useful in analyzing urban development plans of developed countries, this framework must be developed further to fit the Iranian context. The preliminary criteria framework has been developed in this study by obtaining primary data through semi-structured interviews. This framework is supplemented by several components that refer to specific urban development plans in Iranian cities.

CONCLUSION

Local authorities can use the generated evaluation framework to identify the status quo of the urban development process. Supporting planners can also use this framework to improve their urban development plans, to identify the defects in the urban development process, and to achieve the goals of such plans. This framework establishes a general agenda for assessing the quality of urban development plans in the Iranian urban context. Local authorities can also adopt this framework to overcome significant challenges in the implementation of urban development plans.

Although consistent evidence has been found across two datasets, several limitations and suggestions for future studies are worth noting. First, this study does not consider the social differences among the study

respondents. Because of the unique characteristics of the study samples, as Iranian cities have different social contexts, further studies should consider these differences when focusing on public participation. Second, the present study did not consider the financial resources, as each city has own income level. Hence, future research should consider the role of financial resources in formulating the evaluation framework for urban development plans in developing countries.

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