

Review and Content Analysis of Research on the Right to the City in Iran: Exploring the Theory-Practice Gap in Urban Regeneration Policies*

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ABSTRACT

The present study addresses the intersection of two complex and multi-layered concepts: "Right to the City" and "Urban Regeneration Policies". The Right to the City seeks to lay the groundwork for sustainable urban regeneration by emphasizing citizens' right to participate in decision-making processes, monitor and control urban environments, and consider others' rights, thereby enhancing grassroots power. Therefore, it is essential to understand the conceptual components of this right and its theoretical and practical applications in urban regeneration policies. This research is a fundamental-applied study, with data collected through library research. It aims to evaluate the extent to which Iranian studies on the "Right to the City" have addressed its theoretical and practical applications in urban regeneration policies. To achieve this, 87 Persian sources published between 2014 and 2024 were examined through systematic review and qualitative-quantitative content analysis. The findings categorize existing research into six main areas: "urban spaces", "urban management", "social groups", "urban policymaking", "conceptualization," and "regeneration-targeted areas". While the literature reveals a relatively rich theoretical discussion on the Right to the City, there is a notable gap between the production of academic knowledge and its practical application in policymaking processes and urban regeneration. The results indicate that none of the reviewed studies have directly and systematically analyzed upstream policy documents or operational urban regeneration plans in Iran through the lens of the Right to the City discourse. This research gap can be attributed to structural, procedural, and discursive barriers that hinder the effective integration of this concept into practice. This study underscores the need to revise regeneration documents and encourages future studies to adopt more practice-oriented and policy-centered approaches. Such approaches are vital for enhancing spatial justice and realizing the Right to the City for all urban residents, particularly in areas facing urban inefficiencies.

Keywords: Right to the City, Policymaking, Urban Regeneration, Systematic Review, Content Analysis, Iran.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Henri Lefebvre first introduced the “Right to the City” concept as a collective demand for the realization of a just, inclusive, and democratic urban life. This right goes beyond individual freedoms. It emphasizes empowering citizens to engage in the production, management, and regeneration of urban spaces (Lefebvre 1996). Conversely, urban regeneration policies provide a comprehensive framework for revitalizing inefficient and vulnerable urban areas, improving quality of life, enhancing livability, and balancing economic development with social justice (Smith 2020; Manganelli et al. 2020; Cysek-Pawlak et al. 2022). However, global experiences demonstrate that implementing these policies can be challenging. Differences in perspectives among policymakers and planners often hinder the achievement of sustainable and inclusive outcomes (La Rosa et al. 2017; Pultrone 2017; Natividade-Jesus et al. 2019; Adewumi 2020). As a result, new approaches have begun to highlight the importance of integrating economic dimensions, social participation, and sustainability (Moniz et al. 2022).

Since the primary beneficiaries of urban regeneration are residents from dilapidated, inefficient, and underprivileged contexts, the “Right to the City” can serve as a theoretical-practical foundation for promoting participation, redistributing power, considering citizens’ rights, and realizing spatial justice in these communities. This demand originates from these deprived urban spaces, where residents lack equitable access to urban opportunities and rights. Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate the components of the right to the city in the urban regeneration policymaking process. In Iran, the study of the right to the city has expanded significantly over the last decade, especially following the establishment of urban regeneration as an official policy after

the approval of the “National Strategic Document for the Renewal, Renovation, and Empowerment of Dilapidated and Inefficient Urban Contexts” in 2014. Consequently, examining how this discourse is reflected and enacted in urban regeneration policies has become an important research focus. Despite extensive theoretical research on the right to the city, a notable gap remains between this theoretical richness and its practical application in Iran’s urban regeneration documents, regulations, and plans. In other words, it is unclear how significantly this discourse has influenced the policymaking, planning, and implementation processes of urban regeneration projects. This gap may contribute to the relative ineffectiveness of policies aimed at achieving spatial justice and genuine resident participation, particularly in targeted regeneration contexts. Therefore, the present study aims to systematically analyze existing research to evaluate the extent to which Iranian scholars have addressed the “theoretical and practical application of the right to the city in urban regeneration policies” and to identify gaps in this area. The central research question is: To what extent have studies on the “Right to the City” in Iran explored the relationship between the theoretical foundations of this concept and urban regeneration policies, and what research gaps remain in this field?

The sub-questions of the research are as follows:

1. What areas have Iranian studies published between 2014 and 2024 focused on?
2. Have studies in Iran examined Iranian upstream policy documents and urban regeneration plans through the lens of the Right to the City?
3. What factors have hindered the effective influence of “Right to the City” discourse on studies related to the urban regeneration policymaking and implementation processes in Iran?

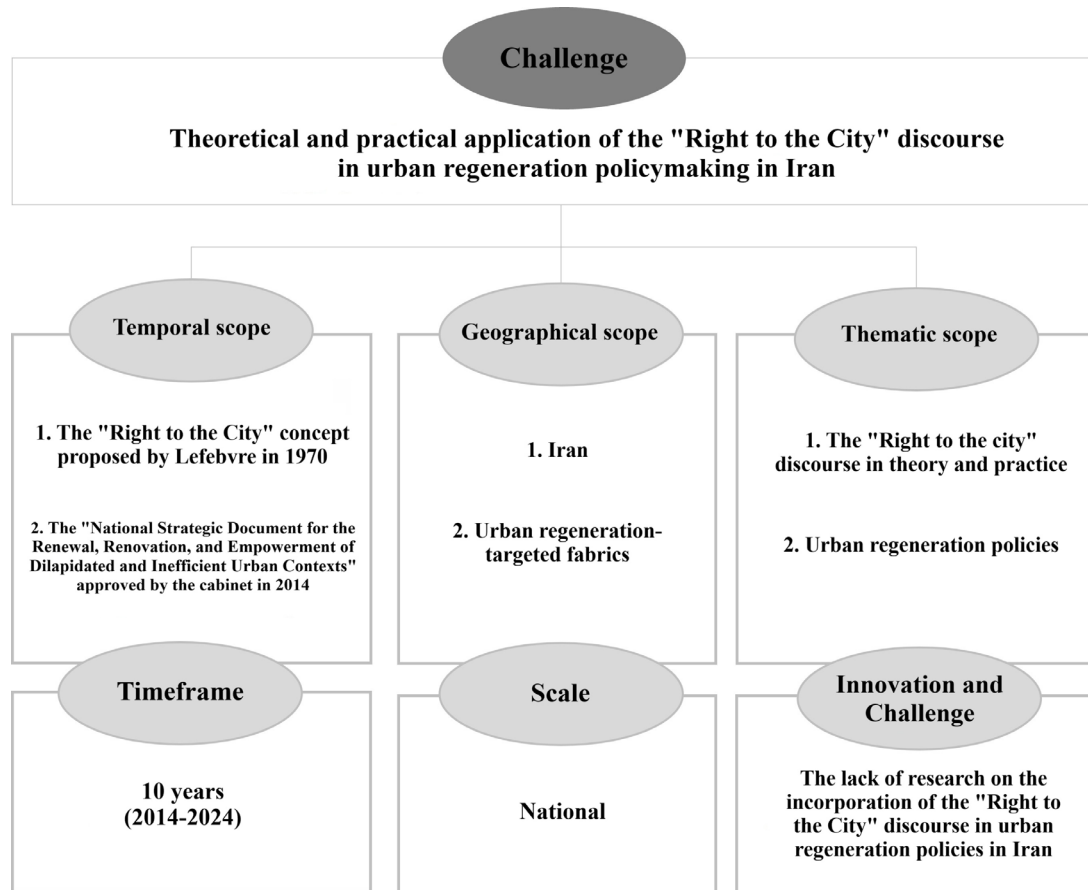


Fig. 1. Review of Research Innovation and Challenges and its Thematic, Geographical, and Temporal Scopes

2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The idea of "Right to the City" was first articulated by Henri Lefebvre in his 1967 book "Le Droit à la Ville" in France. It became a rallying cry during the French student and workers' movements in May 1968. Four decades later, David Harvey restated it in an article of the same title. Prior to Harvey, Marc Purcell had also used the concept of "Right to the City" in connection with citizenship in 2002 (Lefebvre 1996; Harvey 2008; Purcell 2002). Since its initial proposal by Henri Lefebvre (1968) and its subsequent reinterpretations by scholars such as David Harvey and Marc Purcell, this concept has emerged as one of the most prominent theoretical frameworks for critiquing urban neoliberalism and studying spatial justice. In the past decade, the idea has garnered increasing attention in various areas of urban studies within Iran. However, an analytical review of the existing literature reveals that Iranian research on this topic can primarily be categorized into several main groups, each exhibiting its own strengths and weaknesses.

2.1. Theoretical Conceptualization and Localization

Several studies (Rafieian and Alvandipur 2015; Ebrahimi et al. 2022; Gholami et al. 2023) have sought to explain and conceptualize the theoretical foundations of the "right to the city" within Iranian socio-spatial conditions. These studies primarily focus on extracting components and indicators, and they sometimes compare Lefebvre's perspective with that of other theorists, such as Harvey. However, there has been less emphasis on a structured critique of the concept itself, including its philosophical foundations, or its internal contradictions in the context of Iranian society. Many of these conceptualizations lack a clear connection to urban planning paradigms in Iran.

2.2. Policy and Legal Studies

Some other studies (Kamyarrad et al. 2022; Kazemian and Masoumi Far 2019) have examined laws, upstream documents, and metropolitan policies (such as master and detailed plans) in terms of their alignment with the components of the right to the

city. These studies are strong in their focus on the institutional and legal context necessary for realizing this right. However, their main limitation is their largely textual and interpretive focus on documents, ignoring implementation processes, institutional guarantees, and the gap between rules and the practice of urban governance.

2.3. Studies of Specific Social Groups

A notable body of literature has explored the right to the city through the experiences of specific social groups, such as women (Rahbari and Sharepour 2014; Azadbakht and Jahanifar 2023), children (Baghbani 2017; Tamjidi et al. 2022), the elderly (Heydari et al. 2021), and low-income individuals (Farshidfar et al. 2022). These studies effectively highlight the structural inequalities in access to urban spaces. However, they often remain focused on measuring satisfaction or identifying deprivations, providing less in-depth analysis of the power mechanisms that produce and perpetuate these inequalities.

2.4. Spatial-Physical Assessment

This is one of the most common categories of studies addressing the right to the city. Such studies assess neighborhoods, public spaces, and specific urban fabrics (including dilapidated, historic, and informal settlements) using the criteria associated with the right to the city (Samadi et al. 2023; Hosseini et al. 2022). They typically employ quantitative and survey methods to generate valuable data on spatial inequality. A common weakness in these studies is that they tend to disconnect from an analysis of the political and economic processes that create such spatial conditions. In other words, these studies focus more on the “outcomes” of injustice rather than the “processes” that produce it.

2.5. Governance and Urban Management Studies

Some studies (Faraji et al. 2023; Morshedi et al. 2022) have explored concepts such as participation, good governance, urban democracy, and local institutions concerning the right to the city. These studies have progressed toward a meso-level analysis, focusing on decision-making mechanisms and power distribution. However, their primary focus has been on formal institutions, often neglecting the roles of social activism, urban movements, and informal power structures.

2.6. Main Research Gap: The Gap Between Theory and Practical Policymaking

Despite the relative richness and thematic diversity of existing studies, the central gap identified in the present study is the lack of systematic analysis specifically exploring the practical application of the Right to the City discourse within Iran's urban regeneration policies and implementation plans.

Previous studies have either addressed policies at a general level or focused specifically on regeneration-targeted fabrics without adequately analyzing the connection among “theoretical discourse”, “regeneration policy documents” and “practical actions” as a coherent whole. This gap represents the primary issue addressed in the present study.

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The theoretical discussions in this study are grounded in the intersection of two concepts: the “Right to the City” and “urban regeneration”. While both approaches share objectives such as spatial justice, citizen participation, and enhancement of the urban environment, they have not always intersected effectively in policymaking and implementation. The “Right to the City” framework emphasizes the redistribution of power and citizens' right to manage and shape urban spaces, making it a critical lens for evaluating urban regeneration policies. By explaining the theoretical foundations of these two areas and examining their relationship, one can identify theory-practice gaps and rethink urban regeneration policies in Iran.

3.1. The Right to the City: Concept and Components

The “Right to the City” refers to a collective right for individuals to engage in the management and shaping of urban spaces while ensuring equal access to resources, services, and decision-making processes. This concept views the city as an inclusive space that should reflect the needs and aspirations of all residents, rather than solely serving specific groups or market forces (Lefebvre 1996; Harvey 2008; Purcell 2002; Soja 2010). By critiquing neoliberal policies, the “Right to the City” underscores the importance of social justice, inclusivity, and residents' role in the production of urban space (Harvey 2008; Marcuse 2017). It advocates for active community engagement in urban governance and provides a framework for understanding and leading urban struggles (Brenner and Schmid 2015; Gilbert and Dikec 2008). Ultimately, its goal is to reclaim urban spaces and resources for collective use, thereby promoting social justice and inclusivity (Domaradzka 2018).

The main components of this concept include social justice and equitable distribution of urban services and resources (Ahmadi 2021; Hashemi 2020; Harvey 2018; Marcuse 2019), participatory governance and inclusive decision-making (Bai et al. 2020; Parnell 2016), access to urban resources (Lefebvre 2014; Purcell 2019), citizenship rights (Isin and Rygiel 2017; Sassen 2018), collective rights (Harvey 2018; Parnell and Robinson 2019), sustainable development (Kazemi 2022; Davidson and Frick 2020; Swyngedouw and Heynen 2019), cultural rights

(Brenner et al. 2019; Zukin et al. 2020), resistance to gentrification (Smith 2017; Attoh and Kwan 2021),

and the right to urban safety and security.

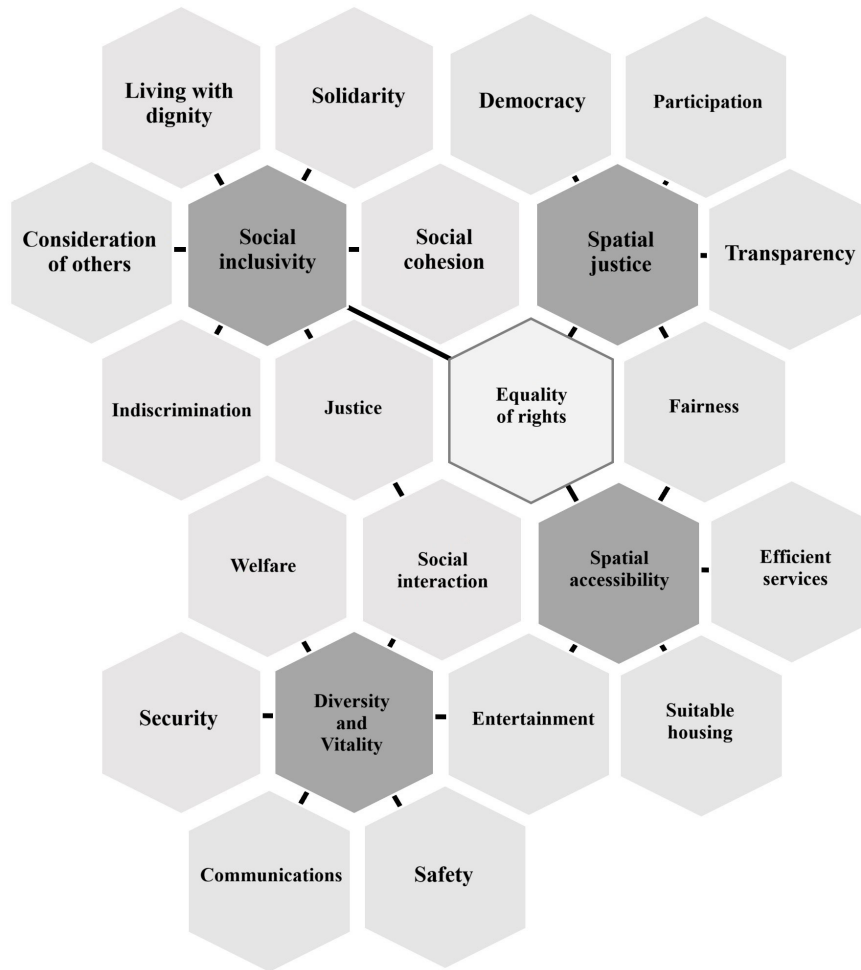


Fig. 2. Components of the Right to the City
Derived from: (Rafieian and Alvandipur 2015; Motaghi et al. 2019)

3.2. Urban Regeneration Policies

Urban regeneration encompasses a set of strategies and interventions aimed at revitalizing dysfunctional urban areas. It represents a multidimensional approach to urban management, planning and design (Alpopi and Manole 2013; Pourahmad et al. 2022). Over time, this concept has evolved from purely physical and economic approaches to integrated ones that emphasize social, cultural, social capital, and community engagement dimensions (Zamani and Asadpour 2023; La Rosa et al., 2017; Samadi and Jahangirzadeh 2022). Numerous theoretical and empirical studies have explored various aspects of urban regeneration, including governance, community engagement, sustainability, smart city,

circular economy, climate change, and power relations (Pourahmad et al. 2022). Today, urban regeneration is continuing to evolve with the integration of digital technologies.

4. METHOD

The present study is “fundamental-applied” research and employs a “mixed” research approach. Its research design is “descriptive-analytical,” relying on a systematic review of literature. Data analysis is conducted using qualitative content analysis, which includes open and axial coding, as well as quantitative content analysis that counts the frequency of coded content units. Data were collected through library studies.

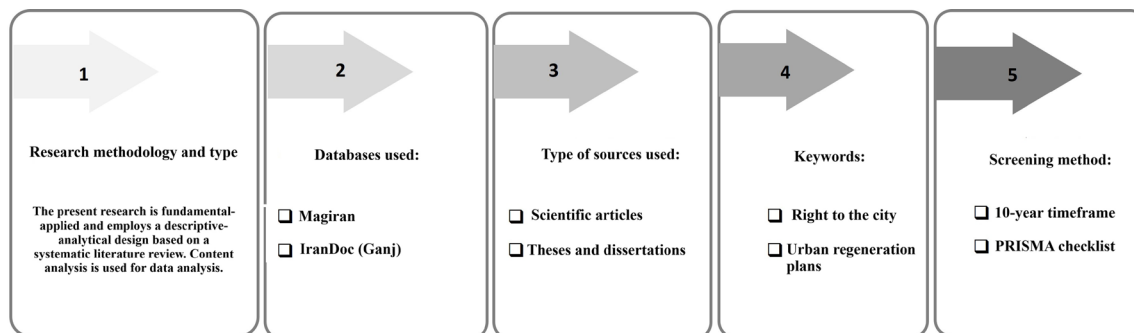


Fig. 3. Research Methodology

This research seeks to identify the content research challenge. To achieve this, the research process includes five steps.

Step 1: Research design: The research aims to evaluate the extent to which Iranian scholars have addressed the “theoretical and practical application of the right to the city in urban regeneration policies” and to identify gaps in this area. The search keywords include “right to the city” and “urban regeneration plans”, with the theoretical foundation grounded in the two concepts of “right to the city” and “urban regeneration policies”.

Step 2: Search in databases: The search was conducted using keywords mentioned in scientific articles, dissertations, and theses written in Persian. The Magiran database was utilized for articles, while IranDoc (Ganj) was used for theses and dissertations. Given the research focus on urban regeneration policymaking in Iran, only domestic Persian sources were reviewed.

Step 3: Screening: Sources published within the last ten years (2014-2024) were screened using the PRISMA checklist. Out of 136 initially identified studies, 16 were duplicates, 24 had irrelevant abstracts, and 9 lacked content compliance. Ultimately, 87 studies were selected for analysis.

Step 4: Data Analysis: Qualitative content analysis was performed in two stages: open and axial coding. After extracting the initial codes, similar concepts were organized into six main categories and several sub-categories. Additionally, quantitative analysis was conducted by counting the frequency of these themes. Finally, the studies were classified into four levels: “around the axis”, “low compliance”, “high compliance”, and “full compliance”.

Step 5: Answering the research questions and conclusions

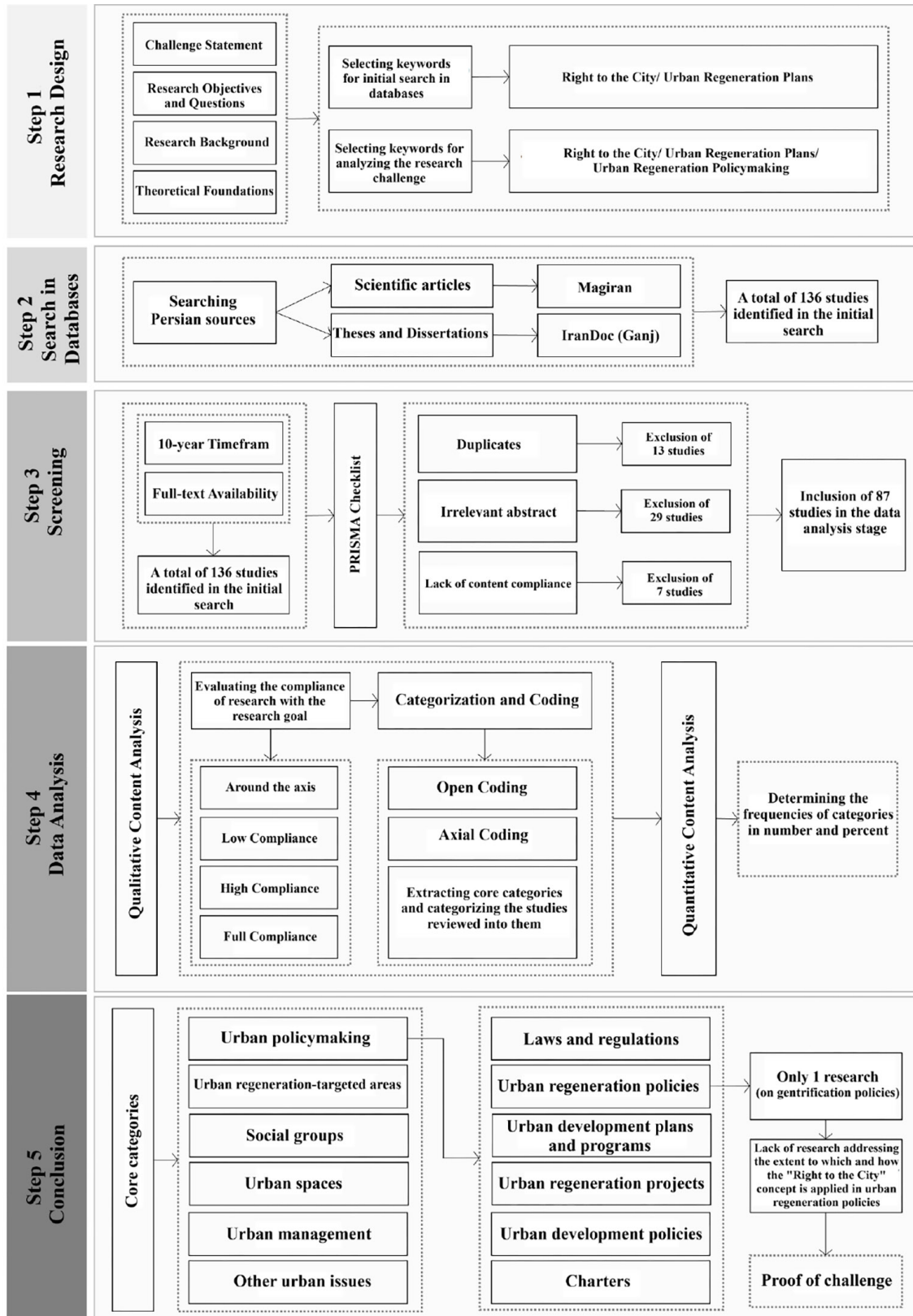


Fig. 4. Research Process

5. REVIEWED SOURCES

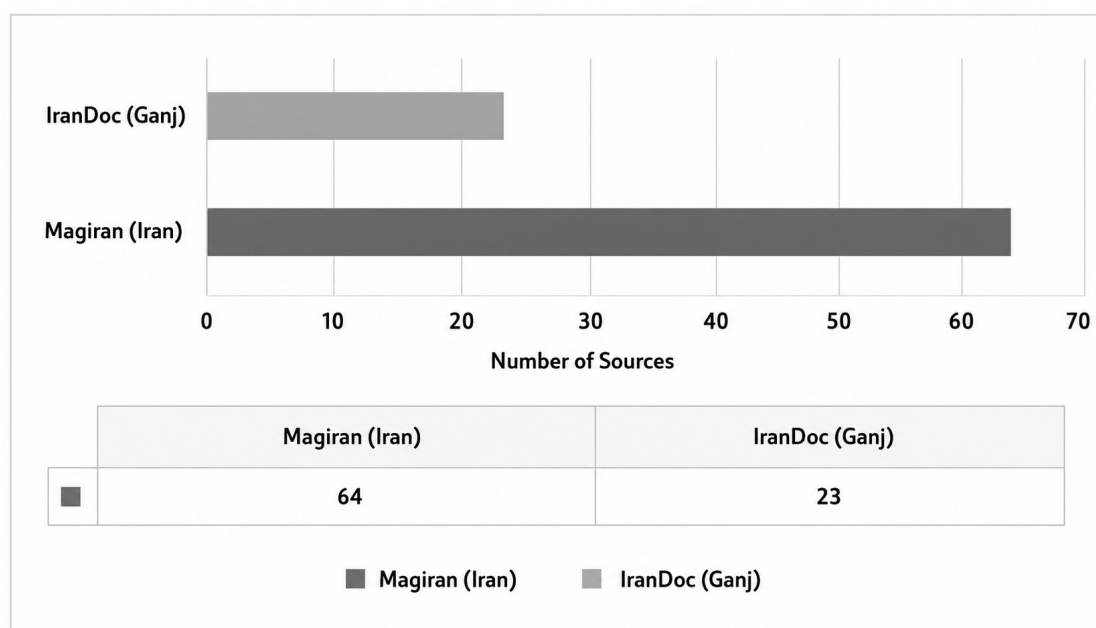
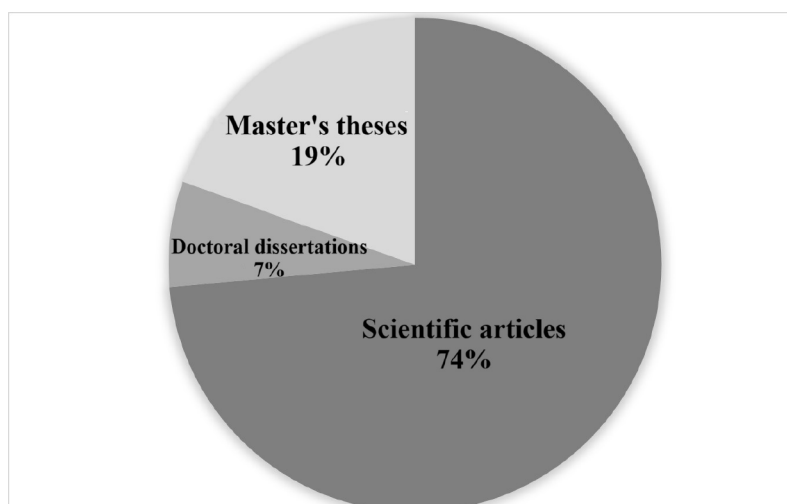
After screening the searched studies, 87 sources were finally included in the data analysis and underwent

content analysis. These sources were divided into three groups: scientific articles, doctoral dissertations, and theses. The distribution of each source type is as follows:

1. 64 scientific articles (74 percent) from a search in the Magiran database;
2. 6 Persian doctoral dissertations (7 percent) from a search in the IranDoc database; and
3. 17 Persian master's theses (19 percent) from a search in the IranDoc database.

Table 1. The Frequency of Information Sources and Databases

Database	Type of Sources	Frequency	Percent
Magiran	Scientific Articles	64	74
IranDoc	Doctoral Dissertation in Persian	6	7
IranDoc	Master's Theses in Persian	17	19
	Total	87	100

**Fig. 5. Databases****Fig. 6. The Frequency of Sources Reviewed (in Percent)**

As illustrated in Figure 6, scientific articles represent the highest frequency among the sources reviewed. It is important to note that during the screening stage,

theses and dissertations that resulted in published articles were removed to avoid duplication, and only the articles were included for review in this study.

5.1. Timeframe of Sources Reviewed

The sources reviewed were published within 10 years (2014 and 2024). The following graphs demonstrate

a rising trend in the number of studies on the concept of “Right to the City” over time, indicating that this concept is currently receiving increased attention.

Table 2. The Publication Year of Sources

Persian sources					
Year	Frequency	Percent	Year	Frequency	Percent
2023	9	11	2018	4	5
2022	16	19	2017	7	8
2021	13	15	2016	2	2
2020	13	15	2015	6	7
2019	13	15	2014	4	5
Total			84		

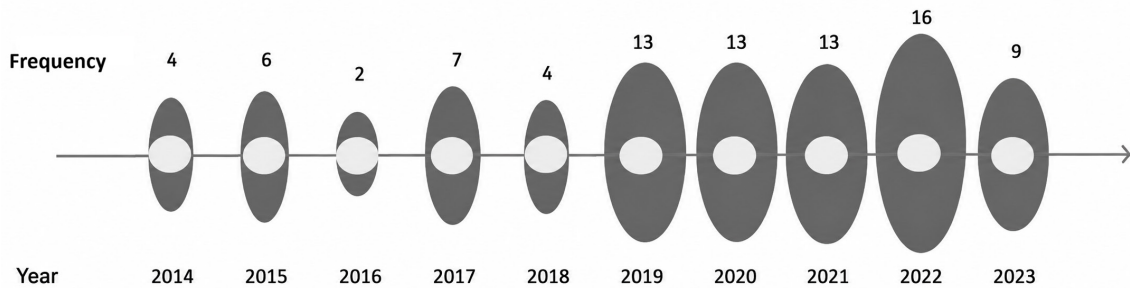


Fig. 7. Frequency and Dispersion of Persian Research conducted over 10 Years

5.2. Geographical Distribution of Case Studies

The table and figure below illustrate the geographical distribution of case studies examined within the

reviewed sources. The selected studies cover a variety of geographical contexts. Among the case studies, Tehran ranks first, followed by Yazd. Notably, 18 sources did not include a specific case study.

Table 3. Geographical Distribution of Case Studies Examined in the Sources Reviewed

Case Study	Authors	Frequency
Iran	(Kamyarrad et al., 2022; Habibnejad and Khosravi, 2021; Hekmat and Bagheri, 2021; Kazemian and Masoumi Far, 2019)	4
Iran, Urmia	(Samadi et al., 2023; Heydari et al., 2023; Pourmohammadi et al., 2019)	3
Iran, Tehran	(Marsousi et al., 2023; Azadbakht and Jahanifar, 2023; Tamjidi et al., 2022 (2 cases); Ebrahimi et al., 2022; Morshedi et al., 2022; Eshtiaqi et al., 2021; Eshtiaqi et al., 2021; Darkesh and Esterki, 2020; Mohammadi and Kazemi, 2020; Fani and Ahmadi, 2020; Rafieian et al., 2018; Javaheripour, 2015; Habibi and Amiri, 2015; Rahbari and Sharepour, 2014; Kalantari, 2020; Beigi, 2019; Shokouhi Bidhendi, 2024; Shakeri Mansour, 2020; Aghaei, 2020; Khosravi, 2023; Soufi Emami, 2021; Samavatipour, 2019; Heydari, 2017; Baghbani, 2017; Kordshakeri, 2017; Soumi, 2017; Falsafi, 2016; Amerian, 2015)	30
Iran, Ahvaz	(Gholami et al., 2023)	1
Iran, Bandar Abbas	(Ebrahimi et al., 2023)	1
Iran, Amol	(Nasiri Amoli et al., 2022)	1
Iran, Yazd	(Hosseini et al., 2022; Zare Shah Abadi et al., 2020; Zare Shahabadi et al., 2019 (2 cases); Akhoundzardini, 2021)	5
Iran, Shiraz	(Farshidfar et al., 2022)	1

Case Study	Authors	Frequency
Iran, Mazandaran	(Soltan Maleki et al., 2022)	1
Iran, Hachirud	(Sanaei et al., 2022)	1
Iran, Zanjan	(Heydari et al., 2021)	1
Iran, Mahshahr	(Dolatshah et al., 2021)	1
Iran, Isfahan	(Safri et al., 2021; Ghalenoei and Sabet, 2019; Saeb, 2018; Shafiei, 2022)	4
Iran, Sanandaj	(Binandeh et al., 2020; Sharifi et al., 2020; Mohammadi and Adak, 2019; Ali Beiki Alavi, 2021)	4
Iran, Kermanshah	(Piri et al., 2020; Gholipour et al., 2017)	2
Iran, Karaj	(Kiaei et al., 2020; Nouraei, 2021)	2
Iran, Piranshahr	(Yaghfoury and Kashefi Doost, 2018)	1
Iran, Bojnord	(Ahmadi et al., 2019)	1
Iran, Parand	(Alaeddini and Jamshidi Nasab, 2015)	1
Iran, Babolsar	(Khodayari Motlagh et al., 2017)	1
Iran, Tabriz	(Alizadeh, 2018)	1
Iran, Mashhad	(Honari, 2020)	1
France, Paris	(Shokouhi Bidhendi, 2014)	1
Global south countries	(Soleimani et al., 2019)	1
Total		69

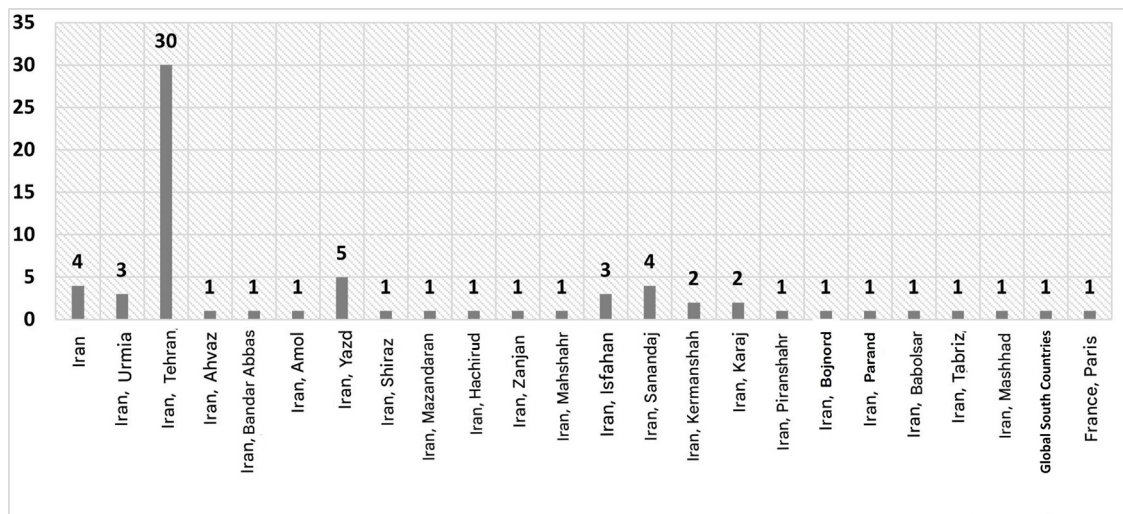


Fig. 8. Geographical Distribution of Case Studies examined in the Sources Reviewed

6. FINDINGS

The findings of this study result from a systematic analysis of 87 Persian studies on the “right to the city” concept in Iran, published between 2014 and 2024. The content analysis reveals that while the literature on this concept has expanded both conceptually and thematically in recent years, there is a significant gap between the production of academic knowledge and its influence on policymaking and the implementation of urban regeneration plans. This section presents

the findings in response to the research questions, focusing on identifying thematic trends, assessing the position of research in urban policymaking, and analyzing the structural, procedural, and discursive barriers to realizing the “Right to the City” concept in practice.

6.1. Thematic Analysis

In response to the first research sub-question, a thorough search and screening process resulted

in the inclusion of 87 studies for content analysis. These studies were examined in depth in relation to the research objectives. Accordingly, research on the

“Right to the City” concept in Iran was categorized into six main categories and related subcategories, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Axial and Open Coding of Categories extracted from Sources Reviewed

Axial Coding	Open Coding	Authors	Open Coding		Axial Coding	
			Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Urban Policymaking	Laws and Regulations	(Kamyarrad et al., 2022; Zare Anderian et al., 2022; Lemraski et al., 2021; Eshtiaqi et al., 2021; Kamiarrad et al., 2021; Habibnejad and Khosravi, 2021; Kazemian and Masoumifar, 2019; Azimi Hashemi et al., 2014)	2	2.3		
	Urban Regeneration Policies	(Baghbani, 2017)	1	1.1		
	Urban Development Plans and Programs	(Darkesh and Esterki, 2020; Shokouhi Bidhendi, 2014; Alizadeh, 2018)	3	3.4	20	23
	Other Urban Development Policies	(Eshtiaghi et al., 2021; Farshidfar et al., 2022; Binandeh et al., 2020; Soleimani et al., 2019; Javaheripour, 2015; Alaeddini and Jamshidi Nasab, 2015; Shakeri Mansour, 2020; Akhoundzardini, 2021; Saeb, 2018)	9	10.3		
	Charters	(Kamyarrad et al., 2021; Azimi Hashemi et al., 2014; Sharehpour et al., 2015; Rafieian and Alvandpour, 2015; Pourkouhi et al., 2022)	5	5.7		
Urban Generation-Targeted Fabrics	Poor Neighborhoods Informal Settlements Slums Dilapidated Fabrics Historical Fabrics Segregation	(Ebrahimi et al., 2023; Samadi et al., 2023; Hosseini et al., 2022; Sharifi et al., 2020; Soleimani et al., 2019; Ali Beiki Alavi, 2021; Doostvandi, 2016; Heydari et al., 2021; Darkesh and Esterki, 2020; Binandeh et al., 2020; Piri et al., 2020; Mohammadi and Adak, 2019; Ghalenoei and Sabet, 2019; Javaheripour, 2015; Soufi Emami, 2021; Akhoundzardini, 2021)	16	18.4	16	18.4
Social Groups	Women	(Azadbakht and Jahanifar, 2023; Safari et al., 2021; Pourmohammadi et al., 2019; Fani and Ahmadi, 2020; Rafieian et al., 2018; Rahbari and Sharepour, 2014; Beigi, 2019; Amerian, 2015)	8	9.2		
	Children	(Tamjidi et al., 2022 (2 cases); Baghbani, 2017; Kordshakeri, 2017; Falsafi, 2016)	5	5.7		
	Youth	(Nasiri Amoli et al., 2022; Zare Shahabadi et al., 2019; Zare Shahabadi and Gholami, 2019)	3	3.4	23	12
	The Elderly	(Heydari et al., 2021; Kiaei et al., 2020; Gholipour et al., 2017)	3	3.4		
	Low-Income People	(Farshidfar et al., 2022; Alaeddini and Jamshidi Nasab, 2015; Shakeri Mansour, 2020; Soufi Emami, 2021)	4	4.6		
Conceptualization	Types, Dimensions and Components Theorists Historical, Philosophical, etc. Backgrounds	(Gholami et al., 2023; Ebrahimi et al., 2022; Kamyarrad et al., 2022; Pourkouhi et al., 2022; Zare Anderian et al., 2022; Habibnejad and Khosravi, 2021; Motaghi et al., 2020; Kalantari and Seddighi Kasmaei, 2017; Athari, 2014; Sharepour et al., 2015; Rafieian and Alvandpour, 2015; Habibi and Amiri, 2015; Aghaei, 2020; Khosravi, 2023; Doostvandi, 2016; Zare Anderian, 2022; Rahimi, 2023)	17	19.5	17	19.5

Axial Coding	Open Coding	Authors	Open Coding		Axial Coding	
			Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Urban Spaces	Satisfaction	(Samadi et al., 2023; Heydari et al., 2023; Ebrahimi et al., 2023; Tamjidi et al., 2022 (2 cases); Hosseini et al., 2022; Farshidfar et al., 2022; Soltan Maleki et al., 2022; Sanaei et al., 2022; Eshtiaghi et al., 2021; Heydari et al., 2021; Dolatshah et al., 2021; Darkesh and Esterki, 2020; Mohammadi and Kazemi, 2020; Zare Shahabadi et al., 2020; Piri et al., 2020; Sharifi et al., 2020; Ghalenoei and Sabet, 2019; Fani and Ahmadi, 2020; Rafieian et al., 2018; Yaghfour and Kashefi Doost, 2018; Heydari and Zarei, 2018; Zare Shahabadi and Gholami, 2019; Gholipour et al., 2017; Alaeddin and Jamshidi Nasb, 2015; Khodayari Motlagh et al., 2017; Beigi, 2019; Shakeri Mansour, 2020; Khosravi, 2023; Shafiei, 2022; Soufi Emami, 2021; Ali Beiki Alavi, 2021; Nouraei, 2021; Honari, 2020; Samavatipour, 2019; Saeb, 2018; Heydari, 2017; Baghbani, 2017; Soumi, 2017; Falsafi, 2016; Sehat, 2022; Amerian, 2015)	42	48.3	42	48.3
	Urban Design					
Urban Management	Participation	(Gholami et al., 2023; Lemraski et al., 2021; Morshedi et al., 2022; Sanaei et al., 2022; Motaghi et al., 2020; Piri et al., 2020; Rafieian et al., 2018; Barati et al., 2019; Sharepour et al., 2015; Rafieian and Alvandpour, 2015; Khodayari Motlagh et al., 2017; Shafiei, 2022; Akhoundzardini, 2021; Kordshakeri, 2017; Falsafi, 2016; Amerian, 2015)	16	18.4		
	Democracy	(Barati et al., 2019; Azimi Hashemi et al., 2014; Amerian, 2015)	3	3.4		
	Governance	(Faraji et al., 2023; Heydari et al., 2023; Morshedi et al., 2022; Yaghfour and Kashefi Doost, 2018; Sharepour et al., 2015; Rafieian and Alvandpour, 2015)	6	6.9	39	44.8
	Power and Action	(Hekmat and Bagheri, 2021; Morshedi et al., 2022; Zare Shahabadi et al., 2019; Sharepour et al., 2015; Habibi and Amiri, 2015; Alizadeh, 2018; Aghaei, 2019; Soumi, 2017)	8	9.2		
	Institutions and Organizations	(Heydari et al., 2023; Morshedi et al., 2022; Rousta et al., 2022; Dolatshah et al., 2021; Binandeh et al., 2020; Alizadeh, 2018)	6	6.9		
Other Urban Issues	Justice	(Marsousi et al., 2023; Faraji et al., 2023; Pourkouhi et al., 2022; Dolatshah et al., 2021; Binandeh et al., 2020; Khezhnejad et al., 2019; Heydari and Zarei, 2018; Barati et al., 2019; Alaeddini and Jamshidi Nasab, 2015; Shokouhi Bidhendi, 2014; Alizadeh, 2018; Ali Beiki Alavi, 2021; Honari, 2020; Heydari, 2017)	14	16.1		
	Health	(Ahmadi et al., 2019)	1	1.1		
	Smart City	(Sehat, 2022)	1	1.1		
	Identity	(Nasiri Amoli et al., 2022)	1	1.1		
	Sense of Belonging	(Tamjidi et al., 2022; Nasiri Amoli et al., 2022; Zare Shahabadi and Gholami, 2019; Pourmohammadi et al., 2019)	4	4.6	34	39.1
Poverty and social exclusion			6	6.9		
Safety and security			3	3.4		
Diversity and vitality			4	4.6		

The core categories identified from the studies were coded into six main categories, including (1) Urban policies, (2) Regeneration-targeted areas, (3) Social groups, (4) Conceptualization, (5) Urban space, and (6) Urban management. Results indicate that “Urban space” (48.3 percent) and “Urban management” (44.8 percent) were the most frequently addressed categories. In contrast, the “Urban policies” category comprised only 23 percent of the studies, with a single study directly analyzing urban regeneration policies. The research topics are analyzed in detail below:

- Urban policy and the right to the city

The literature review shows that 23 percent of the studies focused on urban policies. These studies can be grouped into five major categories: laws and regulations, urban regeneration policies, urban development plans and programs, charters, etc. The laws and regulations group examined the capacities and weaknesses of the Iranian legal system regarding the “Right to the City” concept, analyzing how existing laws align with its principles. For instance, Masoudi Lemraski et al. (2021) analyzed land ownership rules from a comparative perspective, in light of the French legal experience. Furthermore, approximately 10.3 percent of the studies (9 studies) investigated policies related to transportation, housing, and green space in connection with the “Right to the City” concept. Specifically, Farshidfar et al. (2022) examined social housing, while Eshtiaqi et al. (2021) and Akhoundzardini (2021) analyzed public transportation policies in Tehran and Yazd. Notably, only one study, conducted by Baghbani (2017), directly addressed urban regeneration policies and analyzed the effects of gentrification on citizens’ lives.

- Regeneration-targeted areas

About 18.4 percent of the studies examined neighborhoods and contexts in need of regeneration using the “Right to the City” approach. These studies predominantly focused on impoverished neighborhoods, informal settlements, and dilapidated historical fabrics. The findings suggest that the right to the city is generally overlooked in these fabrics, particularly in informal settlements and poor neighborhoods.

- Conceptualization of the Right to the City

Approximately 19.5 percent of the studies focused on defining, explaining, and expanding the theoretical foundations of the “Right to the City” concept.

These studies extracted its conceptual dimensions and components (such as the right to housing, employment, health, and education), compared different theoretical perspectives, and analyzed the historical and philosophical contexts of this concept.

- Social Groups

Representing 26.4 percent of the studies, research on various social groups is one of the more prevalent categories. Among these, studies focusing on women (9.2 percent) and children (5.7 percent) were the most frequent, indicating a particular emphasis on these two demographics in the literature. Studies in this area have primarily analyzed gender and age inequalities in access to urban resources, examined challenges faced by low-income groups, and provided solutions to improve these groups’ access to the right to the city.

- Urban Space Assessment

With 48.3 percent (42 studies), this category has the highest frequency. The primary focus of these studies was to measure the satisfaction, quality, and design of urban spaces (e.g., access to green space and public transportation) from the perspective of the right to the city. Overall, the assessments indicate that urban spaces in Iran are unbalanced in terms of the components of the right to the city, with realization level falling short of expectations.

- Urban Management

The 44.8 percent share of this category highlights the central role of management and governance concepts in the “Right to the City” discourse. The most frequently mentioned keywords in these studies include citizen participation, democracy, good governance, distribution of power, and the role of institutions and organizations. These studies have examined strategies to increase participation, improve governance, and enhance cooperation between governmental and non-governmental institutions to realize the right to the city.

- Other issues

Additionally, 39.1% of the studies addressed various other issues within the framework of the Right to the City. Concepts such as justice (as the main foundation of this right), poverty and social exclusion, safety and security, vitality, identity and sense of belonging are included in these discussions. Emerging issues such as “The Right to a Smart City” by Sehat (2022) and “The Right to the City and Urban Health” by Ahmadi et al. (2019) also fall under this category.

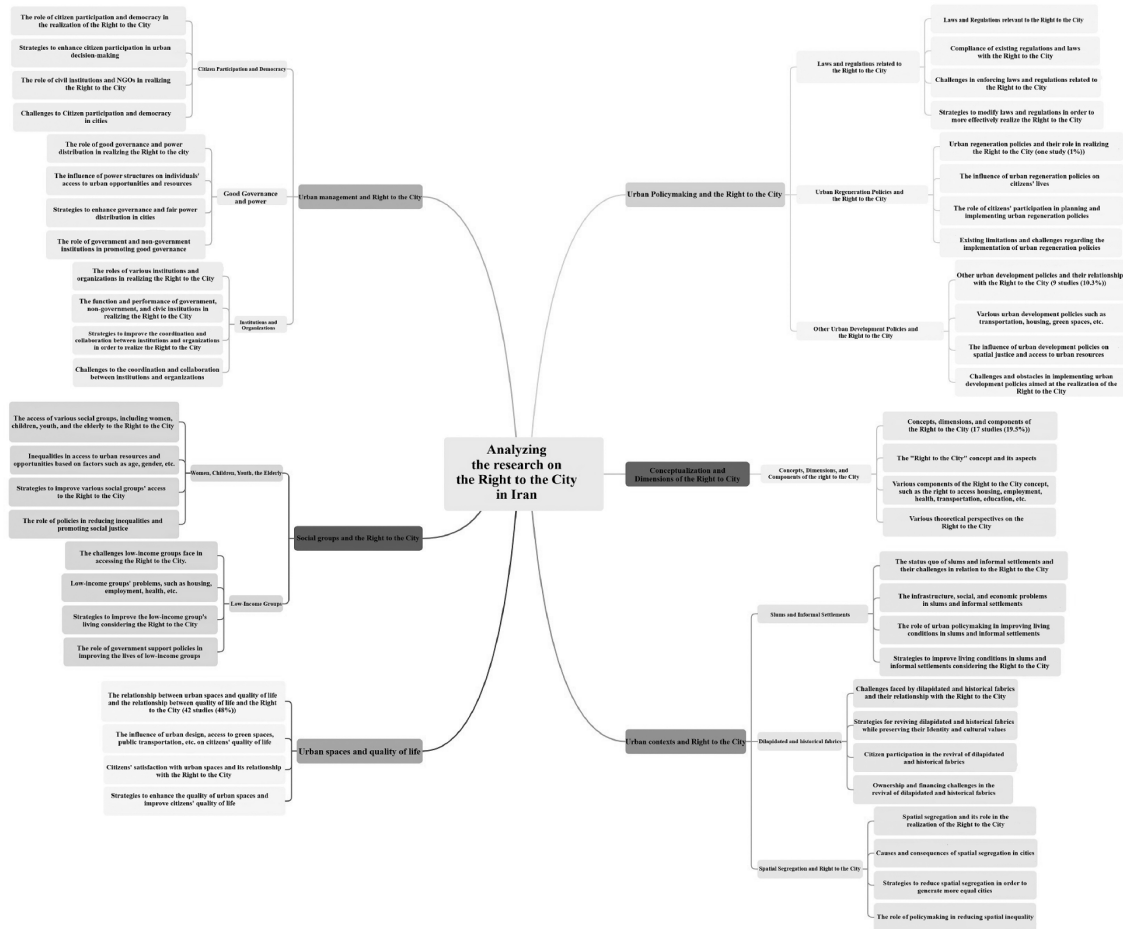


Fig. 9. Conceptual Model Governing Research on the Right to the City in Iran

6.2. Evaluating the Level of Compliance of the Reviewed Research Content with the Topic of the Present Study

To achieve the research goal, information was extracted from selected sources, including each study's type, title, subject, content, and findings. Their compliance with the research goal was then evaluated at four levels: "full compliance," "high compliance," "low compliance," and "around the axis." The full compliance level included studies that examined the right to the city in urban regeneration policies approved by Iran's Supreme Council for Urban Development and Architecture; however, no studies were found at this level (zero percent). The high compliance level included studies that investigated the right to the city in laws and policy documents,

urban development plans and programs, as well as studies focused on regeneration-targeted contexts, community participation, and planning institutions. A total of 24 studies (28 percent) fell into this category. The low compliance level included studies related to quality of life, satisfaction, and urban spaces in the regeneration-targeted fabrics from the perspective of the right to the city, accounting for 27 studies (31 percent). Finally, 36 studies (41 percent) were categorized as "around the axis", primarily addressing the conceptualization of the right to the city, its dimensions, and the rights of various social groups. The overall results indicate that no studies have addressed the Right to the City concept in the formulation of urban regeneration policies in Iran, highlighting a significant challenge for urban development in Iran.

Table 5. The Level of Compliance of Reviewed Sources with the Subject and Goal of the Present Study

Level of compliance	Frequency	Percent
Full compliance	0	0
High compliance	24	28
low compliance	27	31
Around the axis	36	41
Total	87	100

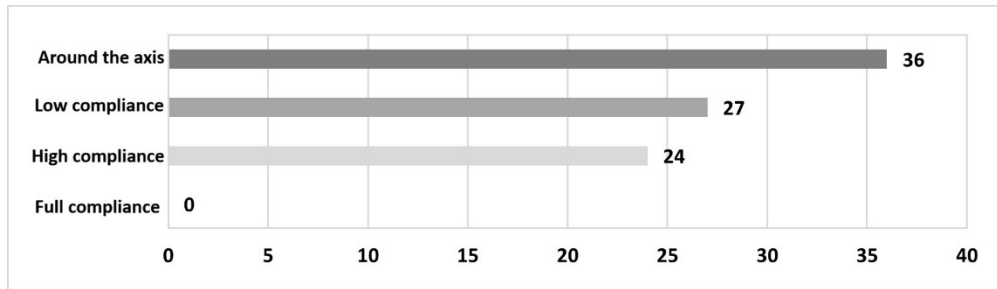


Fig. 10. The Level of Compliance of Reviewed Sources with the Subject and Goal of the Present Study

6.3. The Position of Research in the Field of Urban Policymaking from the Right to the City Perspective

In response to the second research sub-question, analyses were conducted on studies that examined laws and documents. As shown in Table 4 (under the category of urban policymaking), out of the 20 studies that addressed this area, most focused on general urban planning laws, charters, and public policies (such as transportation or social housing). However, very few studies have directly and systematically analyzed upstream policy documents or operational urban regeneration plans in Iran from the perspective of the Right to the City discourse. The details of this finding are outlined as follows:

- Predominant focus on general policies and laws
Many of the studies under the “urban policymaking” category (Table 4) examined general urban planning laws, international charters, or sectoral policies (such as transportation, housing, and green space). While these studies are important for legal analysis and compliance with the overarching principles of the Right to the City, they do not primarily focus on the specific issue of urban regeneration. For example, although the general context has been addressed in studies criticizing the “Urban Renovation and

Development Law” or “Master Plans”, they didn’t directly address documents on “Urban Regeneration Policies” approved by Iran’s Supreme Council for Urban Development and Architecture.

- A significant gap in the analysis of specific regeneration documents

Among all the sources analyzed, only one study (1.1 percent) conducted by Baghbani (2017) specifically analyzed an urban regeneration policy through a right-to-city approach, focusing solely on gentrification policies in a neighborhood. While this study is valuable, its scope is limited to a specific policy and a case study, making it inadequate for a comprehensive analysis of national upstream documents or broader operational plans.

- Lack of systematic analysis of operational plans

None of the studies reviewed took operational and action regeneration plans (such as plans approved by national or provincial regeneration headquarters, or detailed and specific executive plans for regeneration-targeted contexts) as their main unit of analysis. These plans outline resource allocation, project prioritization, participation mechanisms, and evaluation criteria, serving as the focal point for transforming “policy” into “practice.” So, the absence of analysis of these documents from a right-to-city perspective highlights a clear research gap.

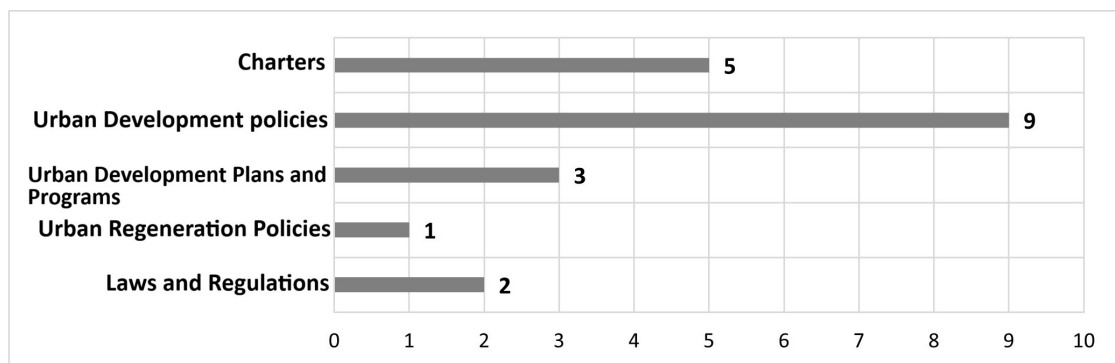


Fig. 11. The Extent to which Research Addresses Urban Policymaking from the Right to the City Perspective

Based on the findings mentioned above, the answer to the second sub-question is negative. In Iran, there are very few studies that have comprehensively and systematically critiqued and evaluated upstream policy documents (such as the resolutions from

the Supreme Council for Urban Development and Architecture) and operational urban regeneration plans within the analytical framework of the Right to the City.

This research gap indicates that the dynamic and

critical “Right to the City” discourse has not yet been integrated into the analysis of practical policies and executive documents in the field of urban regeneration in Iran. Existing literature has primarily remained at a macro-theoretical level or has looked at the

consequences of policies without directly examining the “policy text” and “action plan” themselves. This underscores the need for future research that directly analyzes the content of these documents.

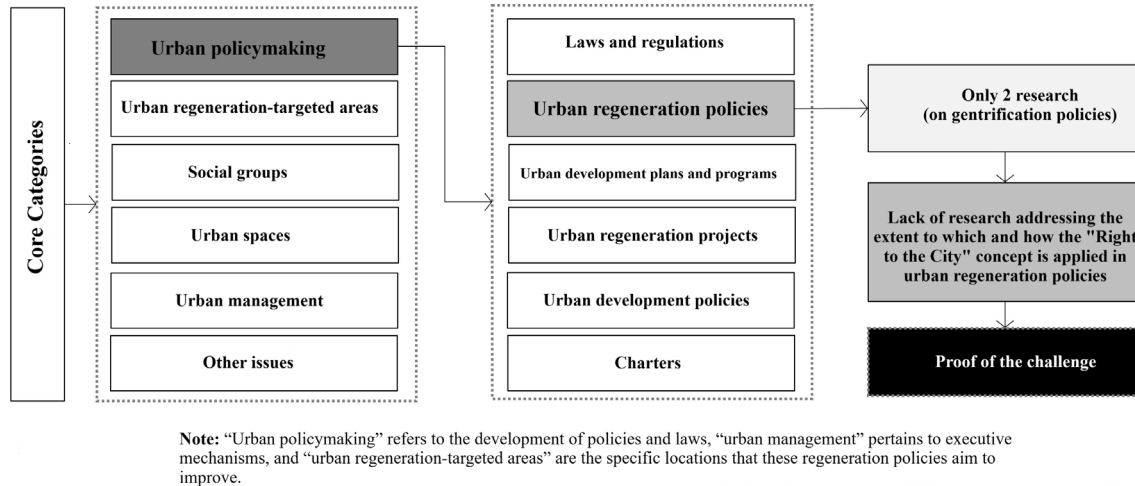


Fig. 12. Research Gap in the Analysis of Urban Regeneration Policies from the Right to the City Perspective

6.4. Factors Hindering Effective Influence of the Right to the City discourse on the Urban Regeneration Policymaking and Implementation in Iran

In response to the third sub-question of the research, the findings from this systematic analysis reveal that, despite the relative richness of theoretical discussions, the “right to the city” discourse has not significantly impacted the policymaking processes and operational urban regeneration plans in Iran. This theory-practice gap arises from a complex set of structural, procedural, and discursive obstacles, as discussed in detail below.

- Structural and institutional barriers

1. Strong centralization of the planning and decision-making system: The hierarchical and top-down structure of urban governance in Iran offers little opportunity for genuine participation from stakeholders and local communities, which is a fundamental aspect of the right to the city. Moreover, major decisions regarding target contexts are often made by central institutions without transparent mechanisms for incorporating residents’ opinions.

2. Fragmented organizational structure and incoherence: The parallel efforts and fragmented responsibilities among multiple institutions involved in regeneration (such as the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, municipalities, Housing Foundation, governorates, etc.) have resulted in a lack of an integrated, human-centered approach. Consequently, concepts such as “spatial justice” and “the right to participation” have become overshadowed by the focus on achieving the quantitative and physical goals of individual institutions.

3. Dominance of a physical-economic paradigm: The prevailing approach to addressing dysfunctional urban areas continues to prioritize “physical development” and the “economic justification” of projects. In this framework, factors such as “added land value” and “return on capital” drive decisions, while the social, cultural, and identity dimensions of the right to the city are marginalized.

- Procedural and implementation barriers

1. Lack of effective mechanisms for participation: The absence of legal frameworks and transparent, institutionalized, and binding implementation methods for ensuring citizen participation in all stages of regeneration (from problem identification to implementation monitoring) presents a significant obstacle, and participation is often limited to merely “informing” or “obtaining consent,” lacking the authority to create substantial impact.

2. Weak social empowerment and limited social capital: Regeneration projects typically do not include long-term and sustained plans for empowering residents (socially, economically, and legally). Without the reinforcement of social capital and the promotion of a sense of collective ownership, these projects often face resistance or indifference from residents.

3. Absence of independent monitoring and evaluation system: The absence of independent institutions to monitor the social and spatial impacts of regeneration projects based on the criteria of the right to the city—such as preventing forced displacement, maintaining social networks, and ensuring access to services—allows for the continuation of unbalanced approaches.

- Discursive and cognitive barriers

1. Conceptual ambiguity and lack of operational translation: In the Iranian academic landscape, the concept of the "right to the city" primarily remains a "critical discourse" or "theoretical framework," failing to evolve into "practical guidelines" or "evaluation indicators" for policymakers and implementers. This hinders its application in documentation and field action.
2. Dominance of a technical-engineering discourse: The prevalent language in urban management and regeneration revolves around technology, engineering, and finance. This dominance often

sidelines or reduces the qualitative, humanistic, and rights-based concepts associated with the right to the city to simplified quantitative indicators.

3. Resistance to paradigm shift: Advocating for the right to the city discourse necessitates a transformation in power relations, resource distribution, and decision-making methods. However, this transformation often faces resistance from stakeholders (including public- and private-sector investors) who perceive their interests as aligned with maintaining conventional approaches.

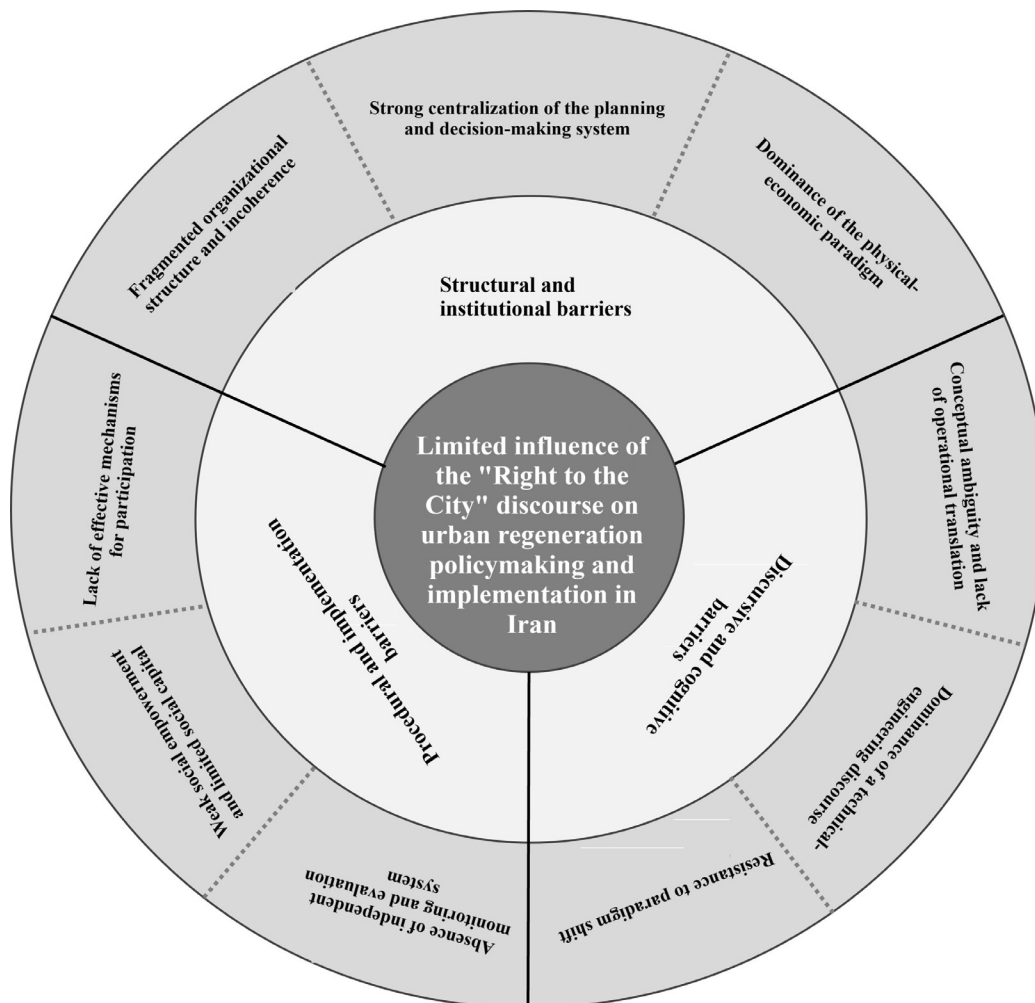


Fig. 13. Conceptual Model of Factors Hindering the Effective Influence of the Right to the City discourse on Urban Regeneration Policymaking and Implementation in Iran

The findings of this study indicate that research has seldom focused on specific governance solutions for Iran. Existing studies often stop at merely describing the problems, failing to provide practical and change-oriented solutions. One significant issue is the lack of action and comparative policy research that specifically analyzes the gap between approved documents and their implementation in the

field. Additionally, there is a need to design and test innovative models for institutional participation. The limited influence of the right-to-the-city discourse is not just a cognitive issue; it reflects a deeper structural tension between the commercialization of space and social rights to space in Iranian cities. Realizing this discourse necessitates a multi-level transformation: Structural level (involving decentralization and

reforming existing laws); Procedural level (designing institutional mechanisms for participation and empowerment; Discursive level (translating concepts into operational language and integrating them into official documents); and Research level (orienting studies towards practical applications and impact assessments. Unless these requirements are viewed as integrated, the right to the city will remain a critical concept confined to academic journals and will not play a tangible role in improving the lives of residents in areas targeted for regeneration.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This research systematically reviewed 87 Persian studies published between 2014 and 2024 to examine the position of the “right to the city” discourse in Iranian urban research and its incorporation in urban regeneration policymaking. This study revealed that Iranian research focuses on six main areas: “Urban space assessment” (48.3%), “Urban management and governance” (44.8%), “Social groups” (26.4%), “Urban policymaking” (23%), “Conceptualization” (19.5%), and “Regeneration-targeted contexts” (18.4%). This indicates the dominance of descriptive-evaluative and managerial approaches, revealing a lack of policy-centered studies. Additionally, the results indicated that no systematic studies have critically evaluated upstream policy documents or operational urban regeneration plans in Iran using the analytical framework of the right to the city. Policy-related research has primarily addressed general laws or sectoral policies, highlighting a significant research gap in the analysis of specific urban regeneration documents. The factors contributing to this gap can be categorized into four groups: structural barriers (such as centralization, institutional incoherence, and the dominance of the physical-economic paradigm), procedural barriers (including the lack of institutionalized mechanisms for participation and empowerment, as well as ineffective monitoring system), discursive barriers (characterized by conceptual ambiguity and the prevalence of technical-engineering discourse), and the absence of action and policy-centered research.

The most important contribution of this article to urban planning knowledge is illuminating a fundamental research gap in the theory-practice connection in urban planning in Iran. This research illustrated how a popular critical discourse (the right to the city) has gained traction in academic literature production but has failed to significantly influence policymaking and operational planning processes in key areas, such as urban regeneration. By providing a structured analysis of research conducted over the past decade, this study creates a framework for understanding the contradictions, orientations, and blind spots in urban studies in Iran, thereby linking theoretical critique to practical policy analysis. The findings emphasize

the need for “developing intermediate theories” and “operational frameworks” that can turn abstract concepts of the right to the city (such as participation, justice, social control) into evaluation indicators, design criteria, and governance mechanisms within the field of regeneration. This is one of the theoretical implications of this research. In terms of practical implications for urban policymaking in Iran, this study cautions that failing to consider the social and legal dimensions of the right to the city in regeneration policies will not only lead to inefficiency and local resistance but will also exacerbate spatial inequality and social divides. Therefore, it is essential to review the content of regeneration documents to incorporate elements such as ensuring effective resident participation, preventing forced displacement, equitably distributing development benefits, and preserving social capital.

Despite aiming for a systematic analysis, the present study had several important limitations. First, the sources examined are restricted to Persian articles, theses, and dissertations published in scientific databases (such as Magiran and IranDoc), excluding gray documents, including government reports, unpublished executive plans, and interviews with policymakers. Second, while the ten-year period (2014-2024) captures recent developments, it is insufficient to trace the full evolution of the “Right to the City” discourse in Iran or to examine its interaction with broader socio-political developments. Although these limitations reduce the comprehensiveness of the analysis, they also offer valuable opportunities for future research to enhance the understanding of this field.

Based on the findings of this study, four key directions for future research are suggested, which can bridge the gap between theory and practice. Through interaction, they can create connections between abstract critique and policy implementation in urban regeneration in Iran. The first direction involves conducting content analysis of upstream policy documents regarding urban regeneration in Iran (such as the approvals from the Supreme Council for Urban Development and national programs) using methods such as discourse analysis or qualitative content analysis, to explore how components of the right to the city are reflected in these texts. The second direction includes conducting in-depth qualitative case studies (including ethnography or longitudinal research) in targeted contexts, particularly informal settlements, to reveal the lived experiences and local mechanisms regarding the violation or realization of residents’ rights. The third one involves developing action research to design, pilot, and evaluate new operational models for participatory governance or social evaluation of projects. This can help bring theoretical frameworks closer to field testing. The fourth direction suggests comparative studies of countries with similar contexts to analyze how the discourse of the right to the city is

integrated into their regeneration laws and plans to extract practical lessons for policymaking in Iran. In conclusion, achieving a just city requires a common language and a connection between the three fields of theory, policy, and practice. This research revealed that the link between “politics” and the other two areas is the weakest in the context of urban

regeneration in Iran. It is hoped that the results of this study will not only enrich academic discussions but also foster practical commitment in formulating and implementing policies that recognize the city as a collective right for all its residents, especially those who are most deprived, rather than viewing it merely as a commodity.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

MORAL APPROVAL

The authors commit to observe all the ethical principles of the publication of the scientific work based on the ethical principles of COPE. In case of any violation of the ethical principles, even after the publication of the article, they give the journal the right to delete the article and follow up on the matter.

PARTICIPATION PERCENTAGE

The authors state that they have directly participated in the stages of conducting research and writing the article.

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