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Analysis of Conflicts in the Realization Process of Urban Projects from Decision Making to Operation

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Abstract

Urban projects in the fields of urban planning and landscape design are often perceived primarily as technical and physical processes. In practice, however, their realization results from the interaction of multiple actors, decisions, and managerial, professional, and executive processes. In many cases, the gap between the initial objectives of projects and the final quality of urban spaces stems from conflicts that emerge during different stages of project development. The aim of this study is to identify and analyze these conflicts throughout the realization process of urban projects, from the stage of decision making to operation and use.

Adopting an analytical approach, this research examines conflicts in landscape-oriented urban projects based on two principal dimensions. The first dimension concerns the main project actors, including employers or clients, designers and consultants, contractors and executors, and users or operators of the space. The second dimension relates to the major stages of project realization, including project definition and idea formation, design, implementation, and operation. Based on this framework, an analytical matrix is developed to identify the points at which conflicts emerge at the intersection of these two dimensions.

The findings indicate that many qualitative problems in urban projects arise from gaps between different levels of decision-making, design, and implementation, as well as from differences in the operational logic of the involved actors. Non-expert decision-making during the project definition stage, insufficient attention to practical constraints during the design phase, executive and financial limitations during implementation, and weak maintenance systems during the operational stage are among the major sources of conflict in urban projects. Accordingly, the study suggests that improving the quality of urban projects depends less on isolated interventions at a single stage and more on strengthening interactive mechanisms within the framework of urban project governance and fostering effective coordination among actors throughout the project life cycle.

Keywords: Urban landscape projects, Processual conflicts, Urban project governance, Urban actors.

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Given the pivotal role of stakeholder interactions throughout the realization of urban projects, the primary question driving this critique is: How do conflicts among clients, designers, contractors, and end-users emerge during the initiation, design, execution, and operation phases, and to what extent do these conflicts exacerbate the disparity between the initial objectives of the project and the ultimate quality of the built urban environment ?

Extended Abstract

Urban development and landscape projects in Iran often encounter a range of institutional, managerial, and operational conflicts from the early stages of problem definition to the final phases of construction and use. These conflicts frequently create a gap between the initial planning intentions and the realized spatial outcomes, leading to projects that do not fully meet professional, managerial, or public expectations. This study argues that such discrepancies do not arise solely during implementation; rather, they begin when a project idea is first formulated and continue throughout the project lifecycle.

To examine these dynamics, the research proposes a two-dimensional analytical framework consisting of: (1) the main actors involved in urban projects—client, designer or consultant, contractor, and end user or operator—and (2) the temporal stages of project realization, including problem definition, design, execution, and operation. Each actor operates within broader political, economic, and institutional contexts, and their interactions shape a complex network of influence during the realization process. By mapping these interactions across different stages, the framework helps identify where and how conflicts are likely to emerge.

The analysis suggests that many conflicts originate in early decision-making processes, particularly in unclear problem definitions and mismatches between planning goals and implementation capacities. During the design and construction stages, constraints related to time, financial resources, and external interventions often intensify these tensions, leading to design revisions, implementation compromises, and declining project quality. In the operational stage, inadequate maintenance and limited attention to actual patterns of use can further reduce the long-term performance of urban spaces.

The findings indicate that the quality of urban projects depends not only on design quality but also on the governance structures that organize relationships among actors. Strengthening collaborative approaches—such as early stakeholder involvement, better coordination between design and construction teams, and sustainable maintenance mechanisms—can help reduce conflicts and improve project outcomes.

Urban projects are not merely the product of isolated managerial decisions or predefined plans; rather, they emerge from a complex process of interaction among diverse actors across the various phases of project initiation, design, execution, and operation. Many of the observed deficiencies in the final quality of urban spaces stem not from flaws within a single project phase, but from conflicts that arise at the intersection of the divergent interests, decision-making rationales, and responsibilities of the involved stakeholders. Consequently, enhancing the quality of urban development and landscape projects necessitates a concerted focus on urban project governance, alongside the establishment of robust mechanisms to foster coordination, interaction, and synergy among clients, designers, contractors, and end-users throughout the project lifecycle.

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