Critical Reviews
No. 2
Aug-Sept 2025
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Deteriorated Urban Fabric in Tehran's Development Plans

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Abstract

The Comprehensive Plan, as the centralized governmental framework for managing urban development, offers no effective solution to address a challenge that has become cyclical in nature. Instead, by imposing construction bans, it exacerbates the crisis and fuels subsequent urban disasters. The imposition of imprecise and scientifically unsubstantiated restrictions on population density in the city and within deteriorated urban fabrics—combined with the plan's uniform approach that disregards the substantial variations in density across such areas—highlights the urgent need to revise the population policy of the Comprehensive Plan in these districts. The Plan bears the responsibility of breaking the vicious cycle of "redevelopment contingent upon the provision of one parking space per unit, and the practical impossibility of providing such parking within existing plots." This necessitates a holistic solution that, on one hand, enables the allocation of construction density within the bounds of rational and conventional limits for deteriorated plots, while on the other, avoids further complicating the prevalent issue of streets being transformed into informal parking areas. Furthermore, the proposed solution must also address the current parking deficit across deteriorated zones, rather than simply preventing future shortfalls.

Keywords: Tourism, Luxury Tourism, Luxurious Tourism, Southern Coasts of Iran

DOI: 10.22034/JCR.1.1.4.1.2.16
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[DOI: 10.22034/JCR.1.1.4.1.2.16]

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What Strategy Does the Comprehensive Plan Propose for the Redevelopment of Tehran's Deteriorated Urban Fabric?

Extended Abstract

Tehran's deteriorated urban fabric—spanning over 145 km² and encompassing more than half its residential area—represents a structural governance crisis rather than a purely technical shortfall. Earthquake hazards threaten nearly five million residents, yet the Sixth Development Plan's decade-long regeneration mandate has faltered under fragmented governance, insufficient institutional capacity, rigid regulation, and limited community engagement. The 2006 Tehran Comprehensive Plan narrowly defined "renewable" areas by structural instability, micro-parcelization, and inaccessibility, initially mapping 32 km² (later 45 km²) while excluding over 100 km² of hazardous terrain. This morphological bias sidelined integrated action to unrealized "special plans," while uniform density limits ignored varying local vulnerabilities, stalling adaptive responses. Experts have identified the plan's "issue-blindness," privileging physical form over socio-spatial priorities such as safety, affordability, and justice. Statistical inconsistencies between municipal and planning bodies reveal systemic knowledge fragmentation. The case of Nafarabad, Rey, illustrates three decades of stalled, form-centric interventions neglecting socio-economic continuity and infrastructure. A critical obstacle lies in rigid parking requirements for density incentives—unachievable for micro-plots—creating regulatory deadlock and encouraging informal construction. The "Safe Neighborhood Core" model, consolidating shared parking and community amenities to enable flexible density, offers a strategic alternative but remains marginal in policy. Ultimately, Tehran's renewal demands a paradigm shift from object-oriented physical recovery toward a multi-scalar, participatory framework integrating seismic safety, affordability, infrastructure equity, and empowered local agency. Without reframing the deteriorated fabric as a socio-political urban metabolism, governance processes will continue reproducing vulnerability and systemic failure.

Prioritizing the physical form of the fabric as the most influential factor in urban renewal does not constitute a fundamentally sound perspective for understanding its significance as an agent in the reproduction of life and identity within deteriorated urban textures. The tangible, morphological values of the built environment cannot be regarded as superior to the qualitative dimensions of living that shape the identity of the urban fabric.

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[DOI: 10.22034/JCR.1.1.4.1.2.16]

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