


## Assessing dilapidated urban areas renovation institutional/structural challenges

Ali Rahimi<sup>a</sup>, Nader Zali<sup>a\*</sup> 

<sup>a</sup> Department of Geology, Faculty of Science, Lorestan University, Khorram Abad, Iran

### ABSTRACT

This study examines the institutional and structural challenges surrounding the renovation of dilapidated and underperforming urban areas in Tehran, with a specific emphasis on conflict resolution among the principal stakeholders engaged in the renewal process. Adopting a post-structuralist perspective and employing the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) methodology, the research utilizes discourse analysis to explore the underlying narratives, assumptions, and worldviews that inform and sustain conflicts among key actors, including residents, developers, municipal authorities, and governmental institutions. This study highlights the critical need for institutional reform and a shift from quantitative to qualitative frameworks in Tehran's urban renewal discourse. It calls for an epistemological rethinking that centers justice, public interest, and community engagement. Urban renewal is conceptualized not merely as physical transformation but as a socio-political process shaped by power and discourse. Using Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), the research explores conflicts among actors across four levels: empirical, systemic, discursive, and metaphorical. The findings reveal that institutional fragmentation and conflicting narratives hinder effective renewal. A more integrated governance structure and inclusive discourse are essential for resolving these conflicts. Ultimately, achieving justice-oriented urban renewal in Tehran depends on addressing both structural and conceptual challenges.

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\*Corresponding author

E-mail address:  
[nzali@guilan.ac.ir](mailto:nzali@guilan.ac.ir)  
(N. Zali)

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### 1. Introduction

Urban decline in historic city quarters presents a significant and complex challenge that necessitates comprehensive and context-sensitive renewal strategies. Globally, cities undergoing rapid urbanization have witnessed the deterioration of inner-city districts, prompting diverse intervention models. In the United Kingdom, urban renewal has evolved from mid-20th-century slum clearance initiatives to contemporary, integrative approaches that address social, economic, and environmental objectives through multi-stakeholder collaboration (Li et al., 2019). Similarly, Singapore's state-led regeneration programs emphasize a balance between infrastructure modernization, heritage conservation, and community engagement,

underscoring the need for cohesive institutional frameworks. These international examples highlight the critical importance of inclusive governance and well-defined institutional roles in ensuring successful urban revitalization. Tehran, mirroring other global megacities, contains numerous deteriorated historical neighborhoods designated for renewal. However, scholarly analyses indicate that Iran's urban regeneration efforts are hindered by institutional fragmentation and insufficient mechanisms for civic participation. Mirzakhani et al. (2022) argue that the absence of a codified delineation of institutional responsibilities, coupled with a lack of participatory planning instruments, perpetuates conflict among agencies and limits the effectiveness of renewal



initiatives. These challenges reflect broader coordination deficits and contested priorities across governance layers. Beyond physical interventions, the discursive dimension of urban renewal—how problems and solutions are framed—plays a pivotal role in shaping power dynamics and stakeholder relations. Recent planning scholarship emphasizes the role of policy narratives in restructuring governance arenas. For instance, [Li et al. \(2019\)](#) proposes a "power arena" framework, informed by the theories of Giddens and Ostrom, to analyze how urban consolidation strategies in China realign local coalitions. Their findings reveal that redevelopment processes often fragment communities into cooperative and oppositional groups, exacerbating conflict and undermining policy effectiveness. Tehran's experience exhibits similar patterns, wherein state institutions, private developers, and resident associations advance divergent narratives of urban progress versus heritage preservation. In light of these dynamics, this study employs a post-structuralist discourse analysis to explore how institutional arrangements and planning discourses co-produce conflict and negotiation within Tehran's old-neighborhood regeneration processes, drawing theoretical insight from global comparative cases. Therefore, seems to know more about the case study area. Tehran, Iran's extensive urban capital with a population exceeding 9 million, presents a unique and complex context for studying urban renovation due to its rapid urbanization, socio-political dynamics, and layered governance structures. The city's historic and dilapidated urban areas cover approximately 3,268 hectares—roughly 5% of its built environment—and are marked by significant physical degradation, vulnerability to natural hazards such as earthquakes, and chronic deficits in basic infrastructure and public services ([Moazzeni and Safarpour, 2021](#)). These areas not only represent deteriorating built fabric but also encapsulate deep social vulnerabilities linked to long-standing informal settlements and marginalized communities. Tehran's institutional landscape is characterized by overlapping authorities among municipal agencies, heritage bodies, and national organizations, creating a fragmented governance system that complicates coordinated renewal efforts. Moreover, the city's political context—where centralized state

control intersects with emerging local governance initiatives—shapes the negotiation of power and priorities in urban redevelopment processes ([Bahmani, 2018](#)). This institutional complexity is exacerbated by the informal economy's role in housing and land use, contributing to governance ambiguity and policy enforcement challenges. Despite several national and municipal urban renovation programs initiated over recent decades, empirical evidence reveals slow and uneven progress in regenerating Tehran's dilapidated neighborhoods. Large-scale rehabilitation efforts have frequently fallen short due to institutional inertia, conflicting stakeholder interests, and inadequate integration of social, environmental, and spatial dimensions ([Yazdani and Soltani, 2021](#)). Economic drivers alone have proven insufficient to spur inclusive renewal, with gentrification processes increasingly displacing low-income residents, threatening social cohesion and cultural heritage ([Masoud et al., 2019](#)). Given these intertwined challenges, scholars and practitioners highlight the critical need for multi-dimensional, justice-oriented strategies that go beyond physical upgrades. Effective urban renovation in Tehran requires inclusive participatory planning frameworks and adaptive policies capable of addressing structural inequalities and fostering local community empowerment ([Talebian, n.d.; Yazdani and Soltani, 2021](#)). The city's specific socio-political and institutional context thus offers a compelling case for investigating the deeper institutional and structural obstacles impeding equitable urban renewal, with broader implications for similar post-industrial and rapidly urbanizing cities in the Global South. The renewal of dilapidated urban areas is inherently multi-dimensional, involving a complex interplay of stakeholders and governance mechanisms. Urban regeneration literature consistently emphasizes that the configuration of stakeholder networks and institutional arrangements significantly influences the success of redevelopment initiatives. Empirical studies, particularly in China and Iran, demonstrate that stakeholder dynamics evolve across the stages of renewal, often giving rise to coordination barriers and inter-agency friction. For instance, [Zheng et al. \(2024\)](#) utilize social network analysis to reveal that limited public engagement during initial planning phases and

fragmented coalitions during demolition and construction phases critically hinder effective collaboration in Tianjin's urban village redevelopment. Similarly, [Mirzakhani et al. \(2022\)](#) show that overlapping institutional responsibilities among municipalities, cultural heritage authorities, and private developers in Iran's historical districts frequently result in administrative conflicts and project delays. Both studies underscore that in contexts where decision-making responsibilities are poorly defined and mechanisms for local stakeholder input are weak or absent, redevelopment efforts risk gridlock and community resistance. These findings resonate with broader urban governance theories, which caution that even technically efficient plans can fail due to institutional gaps, free-rider problems, and the absence of shared strategic alignment among involved actors. From a theoretical standpoint, urban planning is increasingly understood not only as a technical exercise but as a fundamentally discursive practice shaped by power and narrative. Planning theory emphasizes that the framing of urban issues plays a decisive role in shaping policy responses and redistributing influence among actors. Drawing on structuration theory and institutional analysis, [Li et al. \(2019\)](#) illustrates how planning discourses structure power relations, effectively transforming urban renewal projects into contested arenas of meaning-making. Their findings show that dominant redevelopment narratives—often centered on economic modernization—tend to marginalize alternative voices advocating for social justice, community preservation, or historical continuity. Likewise, [Zakariya et al. \(2021\)](#) and other planning scholars have argued that the language used to characterize urban conditions (e.g., labeling neighborhoods as “slums” or “decayed”) prefigures the range of acceptable solutions and determines whose interests are prioritized in the policy process. In the context of Tehran, the prevailing discourse tends to equate “revitalization” with economic growth and modernization, which may obscure or de-emphasize concerns related to social equity, resident inclusion, or heritage conservation. This highlights the need for a critical analysis of how different actors—including state institutions, political elites, developers, and residents—construct competing interpretations of urban decay and formulate divergent strategies for intervention.

While the literature on governmentality and post-political critique has offered valuable insights into how neoliberal urban governance constructs consensus and rationality through technocratic and managerial practices, recent scholarship warns that these perspectives often risk downplaying the constitutive role of political conflict and discursive antagonism. Contemporary studies show that participatory frameworks and decentralization in urban policy may obscure deeper asymmetries of power, rendering political contestation invisible under the rhetoric of inclusivity and rational planning ([Davies, 2024](#); [Cortizo, 2024](#)). In contrast, this article adopts a post-foundational discourse theory perspective, drawing on the foundational works of Laclau and Mouffe and subsequent interpretations by scholars such as Howarth and Glynos. From this standpoint, antagonism is not simply a pathological disruption to governance but a constitutive dimension of the political itself. Discursive formations are not neutral or pre-given; they are the result of hegemonic articulations that stabilize meaning and authority through contingent exclusions. The urban, therefore, is not merely a site for policy implementation but a contested arena where various actors engage in the (re)articulation of what urban renewal means, whom it benefits, and how it should be governed ([Saleh and Landau-Donnelly, 2024](#)). This theoretical orientation resonates with [Mouffe's \(2005\)](#) notion of “conflictual consensus,” which underscores the value of shared procedural norms while maintaining space for radical disagreement over substantive visions and values. Similarly, [Rancière's \(1999\)](#) concept of “dissensus” highlights political moments as ruptures within dominant orders, where marginalized voices claim visibility and contest the distribution of roles, spaces, and speech. These approaches provide a critical lens to move beyond the depoliticized imaginaries often embedded in technocratic urbanism ([Pernegger, 2022](#)). Applying this framework to Tehran's old neighborhoods reveals how urban renewal discourses are shaped by antagonistic logics: one driven by developmental narratives that prioritize efficiency, investment, and modernization, and another grounded in counter-narratives that emphasize heritage preservation, spatial justice, and the right to place. These conflicts are not merely procedural or interest-based—they reflect deeper struggles

over meaning and identity in urban governance. Thus, departing from both managerial policy analyses and Foucauldian critiques that focus on rationalities of rule, this study foregrounds the ways in which discursive contestations constitute the very terrain of urban politics in Tehran's redevelopment processes. Comparative research suggests that the tension between top-down modernization imperatives and bottom-up preservation demands is a recurrent theme in global urban renewal practices. For example, [Banks and Carpenter \(2017\)](#) document how British urban renewal gradually integrated public welfare objectives into planning frameworks, shifting away from purely market-driven approaches.

In the Singaporean context, [Yeoh and Huang \(1996\)](#) describe how the establishment of dedicated planning bodies and heritage councils facilitated more balanced and inclusive redevelopment policies. These international examples indicate that institutional innovation—such as the creation of formal participatory councils or statutory planning forums—can play a crucial role in mediating discourse conflicts and fostering consensus among stakeholders. By contrast, in Tehran, such institutional mechanisms remain either nascent or inconsistently implemented. Although recent studies in Iranian urban planning highlight the emergence of basic participatory practices, they also note that these efforts often lack legal authority, continuity, or genuine deliberative power.

This underexplored dimension—specifically, the discursive construction of urban renewal by various institutional actors—forms the central analytical focus of this study. Through interviews conducted with managers of Tehran's Neighborhood Development Offices as well as executive experts in the field of urban renewal, the researcher identified the key actors involved in the renovation of dilapidated urban areas within the context explored in this study. According to the insights provided by these specialists, four primary actors were recognized in the regeneration of Tehran's deteriorated fabric: residents/local communities, developers/investors, the municipality/urban management, and the central government. The following diagram illustrates the main stakeholders engaged in the urban renovation of Tehran's dilapidated neighborhoods.

## 2. Material and methods

This research adopts a qualitative, post-structuralist discourse analytical approach to examine the institutional dimensions of urban renewal in dilapidated urban areas. The study is informed by theoretical perspectives from structuration theory and institutional analysis, drawing particularly on the "power arena" framework introduced by [Li et al. \(2019\)](#), which synthesizes Giddens' structuration theory with Ostrom's Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) model. This framework allows for a nuanced interrogation of how power relations and institutional logics are embedded in urban planning discourse ([Li et al., 2019](#)). The map of Tehran's dilapidated urban areas is shown in [Fig. 1](#). The analytical strategy involved a systematic thematic analysis of official planning documents, municipal policy texts, national heritage guidelines, and public statements from relevant ministries and local authorities. Through coding and interpretive reading, recurrent discursive tropes such as "modernization," "public safety," and "residents' rights" were identified. This discursive mapping enabled the research to uncover implicit assumptions about institutional roles and actor legitimacy, offering insight into the symbolic "rules of the game" that govern Tehran's urban renewal efforts ([Li et al., 2019](#)).

The urban renovation actors' diagram is shown in [Fig. 2](#). Complementing the document analysis, the study conducted over 30 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including municipal planners, local council representatives, civil society leaders, and property owners. The interviews were coded thematically, facilitating the identification of power asymmetries, conflicting interests, and varying stakeholder narratives. Actor-mapping was subsequently employed to visualize the relational dynamics and hierarchies among institutional participants. This technique parallels recent work by [Zheng et al. \(2024\)](#), who used social network analysis to delineate core and peripheral actors in Chinese urban village regeneration, revealing how power is distributed across different project stages ([Zheng et al., 2024](#)).

To enrich the multi-layered understanding of these dynamics, the research incorporated Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), a method proposed by [Inayatullah \(1998\)](#) that enables the deconstruction of discourses across four levels: litany, systemic causes, discourse/worldview,

and myth/metaphor. The CLA framework allowed the research to distinguish between surface-level technical discussions and the

deeper ideational constructs that shape institutional behavior and urban imaginaries (Inayatullah, 1998).

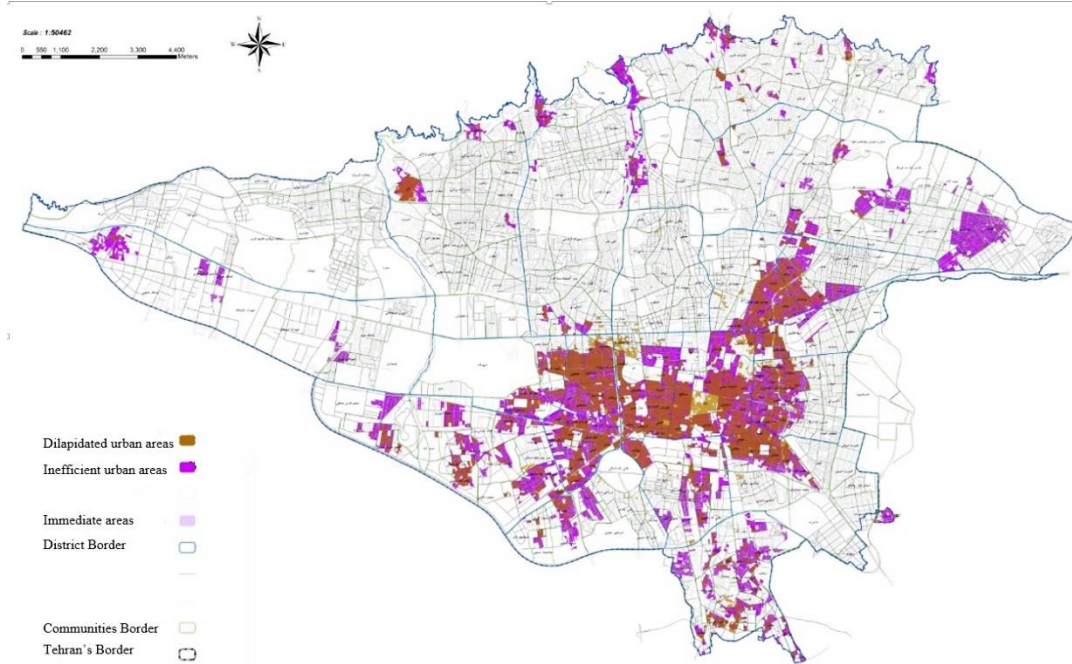


Fig. 1. The map of Tehran's dilapidated urban areas.

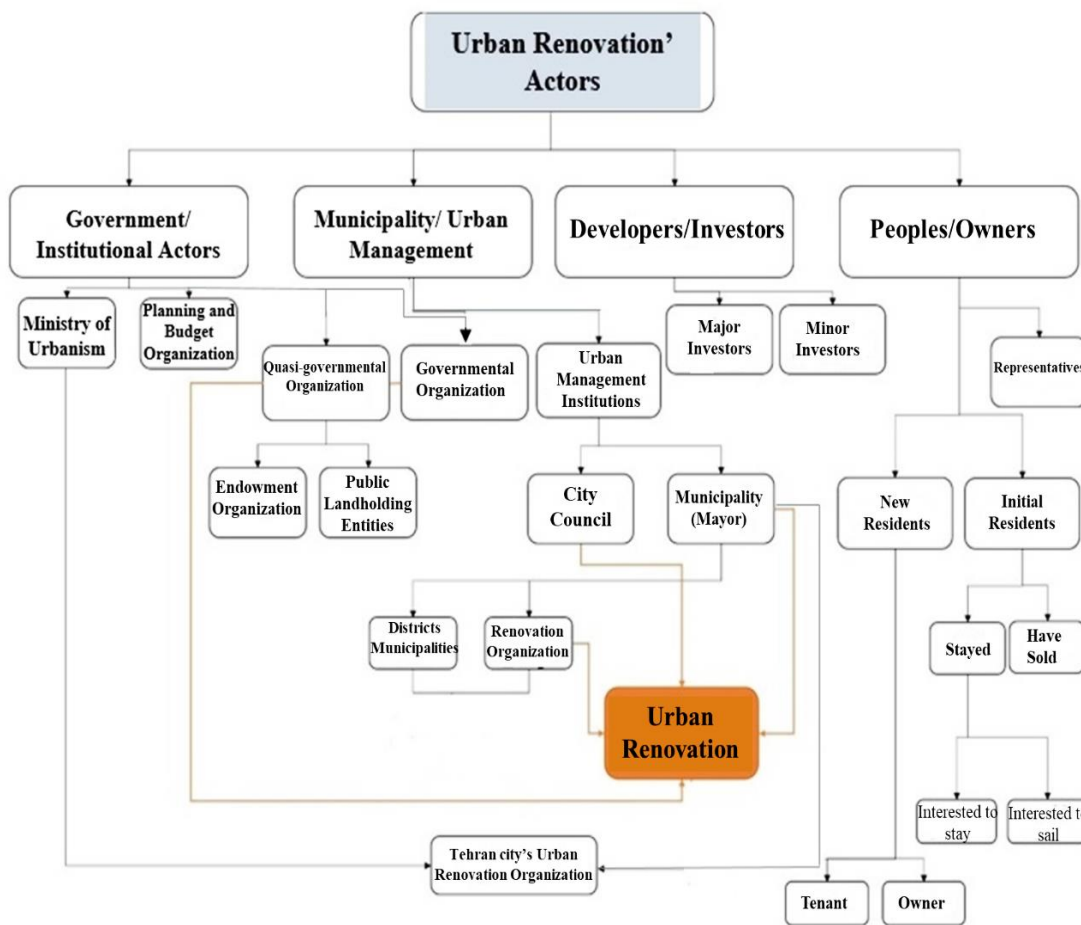


Fig. 2. The urban renovation actor's diagram.

Data collection for this research included the extraction of theoretical codes through in-depth and semi-structured interviews. Theoretical sampling was conducted using a snowball technique, continuing until the point of theoretical saturation, which served as the threshold for determining the adequacy of the sample size. Thematic analysis was applied to identify cross-cutting themes across institutional layers, supported by literature insights. Following transcription and initial organization of data, a rigorous multi-phase coding process was followed, beginning with pre-coding and continuing through initial, focused, and theoretical coding stages. This systematic method ensured that emergent discourses and institutional structures were analyzed with both depth and interpretive coherence. Based on the conceptual framework

of "urban renovation actors' conflict resolution" as presented in the theoretical literature, this study employs thematic analysis to examine expert opinions and scholarly texts within the field of urban studies. Following a systematic review of these sources, including semi-structured interviews and academic publications, an initial phase of open coding was conducted to extract primary themes. These preliminary codes were then subjected to focused (centralized) coding to identify recurrent patterns and core conceptual relationships. Ultimately, theoretical codes were developed for each major category, providing a structured basis for the interpretation and discussion of conflict resolution mechanisms among urban renovation stakeholders. In Table 1 the research statistical population is shown.

**Table 1.** The research statistical population.

	Field of expertise	Urban planning	Geography	Sociology	Political economy	Community Development Consultant Managers	Dilapidated urban areas people/ developers
Individuals (Elites) Professor	Quantity (Number)	7	5	3	4	25	10
Documents (texts)	Document type	Book	Article	Legal document	Development plan	Statistical yearbook	Published elite interviews
	Number	9	47	34	4	5	17

The literature on urban renewal comprises diverse theoretical traditions, each with its own ontological and epistemological assumptions. The classical Chicago School, for example, conceptualizes the city ecologically, using empirical mapping to depict urban space as concentric socio-economic zones (Park et al., 1925). In contrast, Marxist urban theory (Harvey, 2008) treats cities as sites of capitalist production and class struggle: urban renewal is driven by capital accumulation and "accumulation by dispossession," and the 'right to the city' must be reclaimed from elite interests. Post-structuralist perspectives (Foucault, 1980; Flyvbjerg, 1998) view urban planning itself as an exercise of power/knowledge, emphasizing how discourse and governance regimes shape what counts as valid urban knowledge. Lefebvre's critique (1991) similarly emphasizes the social production of space – arguing that urban renewal must be understood through the interplay of perceived (physical), conceived (planning), and lived spaces, and that inhabitants have a "right to the city." Soja's postmodern "thirdspace" (2000) further

integrates these insights, positing a radically inclusive spatial ontology in which "everything comes together: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete." Brenner and Theodore (2002) locate renewal within the multi-scalar politics of neoliberalization: cities are restructured by global capital flows and shifting state roles. Historical institutionalists (Thelen, 1999) stress path-dependent development – institutions and policy legacies constrain how renewal can proceed. The "growth machine" thesis (Logan and Molotch, 1987) foregrounds local elites and coalitions: "incessant lobbying, manipulating, and cajoling" by growth entrepreneurs drives urban investment. Healey's collaborative-planning paradigm (1997) shifts the focus to communicative processes and stakeholder networks, highlighting institutional and discursive methods of knowledge co-production. Finally, complexity science (Batty, 2013) reframes the city as an emergent network system, using computational models to reveal how renewal patterns arise from self-organizing dynamics. In sum, each theoretical lens – from ecological sociology and Marxism to discourse

analysis and complexity theory—offers a different worldview that shapes our ontology (what cities are), epistemology (how we know them), and methodology (how we study them). [Table 2](#) summarizes these approaches and their distinctive conceptions of urban development and renewal. A brief review of the nine major theoretical approaches to urban renewal reveals the need for a comprehensive classification of the key concepts underlying each perspective. Each approach offers a distinct interpretation of the core principles associated with "urban

renewal," reflecting its unique theoretical orientation. Accordingly, the urban renewal discourse is examined through the lens of each approach's worldview—encompassing its ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations. These theoretical positions inform how urban phenomena and processes of renewal are conceptualized and interpreted. A comparative summary of these frameworks and their corresponding conceptualizations of urban development and renewal is provided in [Table 2](#).

**Table 2.** The categorization of urban theories and the viewpoints on urban renovation.

Urban theory	Emphasis in worldview	Urban renovation interpretation
Chicago school	Human ecology, competition theories, market economy	Renovation as a natural outcome of spatial competition, where weaker areas are replaced or gentrified based on market forces.
Critical urban theory	Power structure analysis, capital accumulation, inequalities	Renovation seen as a means of reinforcing capitalist interests and spatial inequalities unless challenged by public intervention.
Post-Structural urbanism	Critique of grand narratives, role of language and power in spatial production	Renovation as a contested discourse shaped by multiple narratives; need to uncover dominant and silenced voices in decision-making.
Lefebvre's right to the City	Social justice, production of space, everyday life	Renovation should empower residents' rights to co-produce space; dominant capital-led renovations are seen as alienating and exclusionary.
Postmodern urbanism	Diversity of narratives, spatial pluralism	Renovation is not a unified project; it must accommodate multiple community interpretations and avoid imposing a single vision.
Neoliberal urbanism	Market-based governance, reduction of state roles	Renovation often privatized, prioritizing investor interests and marginalizing low-income residents.
Historical institutionalism	Role of path dependencies, institutional lock-ins	Renovation constrained by existing bureaucratic frameworks; reform needs institutional reconfiguration.
Urban political economy	Analysis of state-capital relations, historical materialism	Renovation reflects structural conflicts between state interests, developer profit motives, and marginalized communities.
Communicative planning theory	Consensus-building, communicative rationality	Renovation as a process of deliberative engagement, emphasizing inclusion of community voices and transparent negotiation between stakeholders.
Data-Based urban science	Use of quantitative tools, predictive analysis	Renovation outcomes modeled using spatial data and socio-economic indicators to guide decision-making and scenario-building.

### 3. Results and discussion

The study's findings reveal significant discursive and institutional divisions among the stakeholders involved in the renovation of Tehran's deteriorated neighborhoods. Municipal authorities and private developers frequently portray these areas as "inefficient," emphasizing the need for modernization through metrics such as floor-area ratios, seismic safety, and improved traffic circulation. This technocratic, modernist framing prioritizes economic rationality and infrastructural optimization. In contrast, resident associations and cultural heritage advocates advance a preservationist narrative, highlighting the social fabric, historical value,

and concerns over equitable redevelopment. These divergent perspectives resemble the "cooperative versus uncooperative" dichotomy observed by [Li et al. \(2019\)](#) in the context of Chinese urban consolidation, wherein some residents align with state-led visions while others express skepticism rooted in distrust of official narratives ([Li et al., 2019](#)).

In Tehran, this discursive split has materialized in episodes of public resistance and delays in implementation when affected residents perceive a lack of transparency, inadequate compensation, or exclusion from decision-making processes.

[Mirzakhani et al. \(2022\)](#) similarly document that such conflicts are frequently fueled by narrative misalignment, especially when the

heritage institutions' preservation imperatives clash with the developmental agendas of urban planning bodies (Mirzakhani et al., 2022). To illustrate the method and introduce the coding process in this research, an example of deriving concepts from the explored data is presented in the table below. This table covers the first stage of coding in the study. In this table, 'P' denotes the interviewed person, while 'D' represents the studied document. At this stage, 297 themes have been extracted and coded from the interviews and text analyses (Table 4). In the next stage, axial coding and the generation of secondary concepts (categories) are performed. Broadly, in the axial coding stage, diverse codes are categorized into selective codes, and all summarized coded data are organized. Essentially, the researcher begins analyzing

their codes, considering how various primary concepts can be combined to form overarching themes. Given the presence of numerous repetitive or similar codes, the researcher—after multiple reviews and identification of similarities/differences—merges codes with shared content and labels them under a more abstract, common code. This process involved iterative back-and-forth between open codes and initial axial categories, guided by theoretical insights. Ultimately, categories with stronger conceptual power and better capacity to link subcategories were selected. In this stage, the 297 initially extracted codes—related to structural factors exacerbating conflicts among urban renewal actors in Tehran—were grouped into 5 secondary categories/themes.

**Table 4.** Sample quote (Initial statement), primary code, descriptive code, initial concepts.

Source	Sample quote (Initial statement)	Primary code	Descriptive code	Initial concepts
P9	"We must foreground the political economy—indeed, the hegemony of profit's grand narrative, and the logic of the capitalist city."	T17	Critical political economy in urbanism	Profit-driven urban transformation
P13	"When conducting a critical reading of this issue within a post-structuralist context, we inevitably treat capital as an autonomous phenomenon that has entered the scene—one that fundamentally disregards existing structures. It possesses the capacity to unilaterally reshape everything to its advantage, reconfigure agencies toward its own ends, and ultimately, within frameworks like 'competitiveness' or 'spatial economy,' we witness a form of fabricated/artificial urbanization."	T7	Capital as an autonomous force	Structural erasure in neoliberal urbanization

These discursive tensions are compounded by institutional fragmentation. The city's planning, housing, and cultural heritage institutions often possess overlapping or ambiguously defined mandates, leading to fragmented authority and operational contradictions. Our findings support Mirzakhani et al. (2022) observations that this lack of institutional clarity fosters adversarial dynamics, as multiple organizations assert competing claims to decision-making power without effective coordination mechanisms. For instance, inconsistencies arise when residents receive conflicting information or promises from different agencies, eroding trust in the planning process. Consequently, the rhetoric of collaboration—commonly framed around notions of “partnership”—frequently lacks substantive implementation. In some instances, property owners declined to participate in collective redevelopment schemes, a phenomenon comparable to the free-rider problem described by Erfani and Roe (2020), whereby disillusioned stakeholders opt

out, weakening the coalition necessary for project success (Erfani and Roe, 2020). Thus, the interplay of rigid institutional silos and competing urban narratives significantly impedes the efficacy of renewal initiatives in Tehran's historic neighborhoods. The urban renewal transformation framework is shown in Table 5. From the initial set of 596 propositions gathered during the data analysis phase, 297 preliminary codes were systematically extracted. These codes were then analytically organized into five overarching macro-categories, enabling a structured interpretation of the data and facilitating the identification of key thematic domains relevant to urban renovation and actor conflict resolution. The subsequent analytical phase focused on the codification and development of secondary concepts, or axial categories, derived from the initial set of open codes. In this stage, the researcher systematically organized the coding data by grouping related codes into selective categories, thereby facilitating the emergence of higher-order conceptual themes.

Primary Concept (English)	Frequency	Secondary Concepts	Thematic Division	Transformations Strategies
Reforming policymaking procedures	13			
Fulfill government obligations	14	Transparency, Inter-agency collaboration		<i>Establish "Liquid Democracy" councils where citizens vote on policies via blockchain</i>
Reforming institution structure	34		Governance & Policy Alchemy	
Institutional consensus	10	Rule of law		<i>Create hybrid human-AI arbitration panels for conflict resolution</i>
Neighborhood-based policies	8			
Prioritize problem-solving approach	15	Cultural preservation	Community Phoenix Rising	<i>Launch "Memory Banks" to archive oral histories as NFT-based land deeds</i>
Recognizing residents' rooted rights	4	Social inclusion		<i>Issue "Root Certificates" granting veto power over disruptive projects</i>
Reforming managers' approach and attitudes	12	Anti-corruption	Leadership Shape shifting	<i>Mandate social responsibilities-assisted empathy training for bureaucrats</i>
Reducing capital's bargaining power	11	Ethical leadership		<i>Deploy "Karma Algorithms" to blacklist exploitative investors</i>
Smart process automation	15	Data-driven decision-making	Technological Metamorphosis	<i>Build AR "Policy Reaction twins" that visually simulate outcomes before implementation</i>
Public/official awareness	23	Digital governance		<i>Implant neural laces for real-time public sentiment analysis</i>
Reducing profit-based approaches	11	Affordable housing		<i>Replace property taxes with "Community Energy Tokens" mined through civic participation</i>
Regulating profits in renewal	9	Social entrepreneurship	Economic Transubstantiation	<i>Create "Public Funds" that drain speculative capital into cooperative trusts</i>

This involved a critical examination of overlapping and recurrent codes, with the goal of identifying shared patterns and synthesizing them into more abstract constructs. Codes with common content and conceptual affinity were merged and relabeled under unifying themes that possessed greater theoretical abstraction than the initial codes. This integration process was informed by theoretical sensitivity and guided by the logical progression from open codes to more cohesive central categories. Emphasis was placed on selecting those categories with the greatest conceptual density—categories capable of linking diverse codes and subcategories into coherent analytical frameworks. At the conclusion of this phase, a total of 297 refined codes were clustered into three major secondary categories, each representing a critical dimension of the factors influencing conflict resolution in the context of urban renovation within Tehran's deteriorated neighborhoods. Drawing on the study's theoretical foundations, five conceptual categories were identified to characterize the dynamics of actor conflict resolution in the renovation of dilapidated urban areas:

Governance & Policy Alchemy, Community Phoenix Rising, Leadership Shape Shifting, Technological Metamorphosis, and Economic Transubstantiation. Among these, Governance & Policy Alchemy emerged as the most influential and conceptually central category. This dimension encompasses a wide array of institutional and procedural challenges, underscoring the pivotal role of governance in shaping renovation outcomes. The urban renovation identified categories is shown in Fig. 3.

From the 297 total codes analyzed, the majority—86 codes (approximately 40%)—were categorized under Institutional Reform and Transformation, highlighting the urgency of structural realignment in policy implementation. Additionally, 53 codes (25%) pertain to the Role of the State, emphasizing the critical influence of state responsibility and regulatory engagement. A further 32 codes (15%) were classified under Institutional Consensus, reflecting the importance of cross-agency coordination and policy coherence. The Fulfillment of Public Interest accounted for 29 codes (13%), indicating stakeholder demand

for more inclusive and socially responsive planning practices. Other key subcategories include Smartization and Digitalization with 21 codes (10%), Residents' Rooted Rights with 18 codes (8%), Financial Corruption with 17 codes (8%), Justice-Based Approaches with 15 codes (7%), and Profit-Based Approaches with 12

codes (6%). Collectively, these subcategories reveal the complex interplay of institutional integrity, participatory equity, and developmental narratives that underpin conflict resolution among urban renewal actors in Tehran's deteriorated neighborhoods. The thematic codes frequency is shown in Table 6.

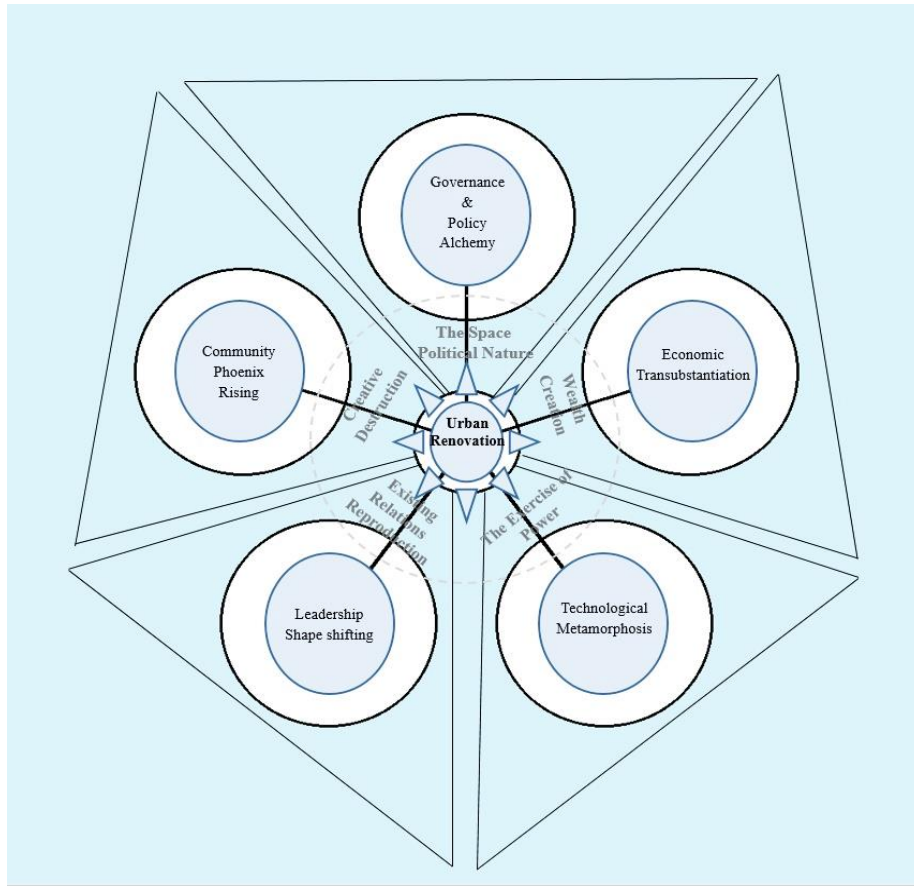


Fig. 3. The urban renovation identified categories.

Table 6. The thematic codes frequency.

Concept	Frequency	Percent	Example Phrases
Institutional Reform/Transformation	86	40%	Structural reform, reforming managers' attitudes, revising current procedures
Role of the State	53	25%	Fulfilling government obligations, financial support, addressing neglect in modernization
Institutional Consensus	32	15%	Institutional coordination, forming a supreme council, preventing institutional fragmentation
Fulfilling Public Interest	29	13%	Promoting a culture of public interest, justice-oriented approach, profit redistribution
Smartization/Digitalization	21	10%	Systematizing processes, smart field surveys
Residents Rooted Rights	18	8%	Recognizing residents' rooted rights, preventing forced displacement
Financial Corruption	17	8%	Combating corruption, contract transparency, oversight to prevent abuse
Justice-based Approach	15	7%	Supporting underprivileged neighborhoods, equitable resource distribution
Neighborhood-based Approach	14	7%	Local participation, neighborhood-based decision-making
Profit-based Approach	12	6%	Regulating modernization profits, preventing unchecked capital exploitation
<b>SUM</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>100</b>	

The findings indicate that in the context of Tehran, the prevailing interpretation of urban renovation in dilapidated areas is predominantly situated within the framework of Institutional Reform and Transformation, often reflecting a classical perspective akin to the ecological approach of the Chicago School. This perspective emphasizes a quantitatively driven, spatially deterministic understanding of urban renewal, rooted in early 20th-century urban sociology. Influenced by Chicago School principals, renovation is commonly conceptualized as a physical intervention—measured in terms of surface area restored and population thresholds affected—rather than as a holistic socio-spatial process. Such an approach tends to prioritize metrics like the extent of built area redevelopment and economic outputs, often aligning with profit-oriented financing models that operate within rigid territorial frameworks. This instrumental logic, while administratively convenient, stands in contrast to justice-oriented paradigms that emphasize environmental and social indicators, including equity, participation, and community well-being. Within this dominant model, urban renovation is frequently reduced to a quantifiable product—manifesting in spatial “crystals” such as redesigned city blocks—rather than being recognized as a dynamic socio-political process that mediates between competing urban visions. From an epistemological standpoint, the Institutional Reform and Transformation category often neglects the relational and discursive roots of conflict among urban actors, particularly those essential to a justice-oriented understanding of renovation. Although this category has gained traction within critical urban theory, its application in Tehran appears to remain largely structural and technocratic, giving limited attention to the deeper processes of negotiation, meaning-making, and power dynamics that shape urban redevelopment outcomes. This expanded analysis confirms that the renovation of Tehran’s dilapidated urban areas is shaped as much by institutional power dynamics and discursive frameworks as by physical redevelopment efforts. Institutional ambiguities, overlapping mandates, and divergent stakeholder narratives have consistently hindered progress—findings that align with [Mirzakhani et al. \(2022\)](#), who document similar inter-agency conflicts and regulatory fragmentation in Iran’s historical

urban regeneration projects. When placed within a comparative international context, Tehran’s challenges are not unique. In cities such as London and Manchester, studies indicate that reframing the urban renewal discourse to emphasize community well-being and social outcomes—beyond mere increases in property value—has led to more inclusive and sustainable regeneration outcomes. Similarly, Singapore’s experience demonstrates the importance of establishing dedicated renewal authorities capable of mediating between competing goals of development and preservation, thereby facilitating more balanced and equitable planning decisions. The discourse-focused findings of this study suggest that Tehran would similarly benefit from redefining its urban renewal narrative. Specifically, greater emphasis should be placed on resident participation, cultural identity, and social justice—not merely on efficiency, growth, or technocratic rationality. Resolving the entrenched conflicts among Tehran’s renovation actors will therefore require both structural and discursive transformation. Structurally, the evidence supports [Mirzakhani et al. \(2022\)](#) recommendation to establish a comprehensive legal and administrative framework to coordinate urban regeneration efforts. A unified governance body with clearly defined responsibilities and jurisdiction could help mitigate the fragmentation observed in the current institutional landscape. Discursively, a reorientation is also essential. Urban planners and policymakers must move beyond the singular metaphor of progress and instead acknowledge the complex, lived experiences embedded in Tehran’s historic neighborhoods. This may involve formalizing the authority of resident councils, incorporating heritage experts into the planning process, and building inclusive stakeholder coalitions. Such strategies are echoed in contemporary planning theory, which increasingly advocates for participatory and cross-sectoral approaches in urban development ([Yigitcanlar et al., 2018](#)). Ultimately, the application of post-structural discourse analysis in this study has illuminated the underlying assumptions and power asymmetries that shape Tehran’s renovation process. By surfacing these discursive dynamics, policymakers are better positioned to design renewal strategies that are both equitable and structurally coherent. Broadly speaking, in

this research several foundational preconditions shape the current state of urban renewal discourse and practice. First is the persistent continuity of the status quo, which underscores the urgent need for Institutional Reform and Transformation. This necessity calls for a sustained engagement with urban studies—not merely as a diagnostic tool but as a transformative field focused on identifying and promoting qualitative indicators of change. Such reform-oriented inquiry demands a shift from quantitative, surface-level metrics to more nuanced, evaluative frameworks that account for institutional effectiveness, participatory governance, and social equity. Second, an epistemological re-evaluation of the concept of urban renewal is required. This critical rethinking interrogates dominant paradigms and advocates for a broadened conceptualization of urban renewal that encompasses diverse normative and philosophical orientations. Emerging within this discourse is a growing emphasis on revalorizing the philosophical foundations of urban renewal by introducing alternative constructs such as public interest renewal,

justice-oriented renewal, and neighborhood-centered renewal. These evolving frameworks seek to embed the process of urban regeneration within broader ideals, including social justice, collective agency, and the moral aspirations of individuals. By invoking the idealist dimensions of civic engagement, this epistemological shift aspires to reframe urban renewal not solely as a technical process, but as a transformative and socially embedded endeavor. Third, considering the presented topics and the analysis of the concept of urban renewal in the CLA method four layers, this research tries to introduce a reading of the concept of Tehran’s dilapidated urban areas renovation actors conflict resolution in the context of Tehran in each of the layers. - First layer (obvious and accepted reality) - Second layer (system-related reasons) - Third layer (structures and discourse/worldview) - Fourth layer (metaphor/myth). Thus, the explored levels along with the key components of each level, based on causal layer analysis (CLA) from the perspective of experts in this field, are presented in the [Table 7](#).

**Table 7.** Codes levels according to Causal Layer Analysis (CLA).

Questions	Cluster Layered Analysis (CLA)					
	Layer 1	Layer 2			Layer 3	Layer 4
What is the institution structural challenges of dilapidated urban areas of Tehran?	The critical need to Evaluation of current interventions	The critical need to reform policymaking procedures	The critical need to prioritize service allocation in building construction permits	Gaps in technical oversight	The need for people-first approaches	The critical need to map possible futures  The need to consider different scenarios  Require to improve the people of dilapidated urban areas' hope
	The critical need to define economically viable renewal projects	The critical need to reform managerial attitudes	The critical need to reform service provision	The lack of a unified mechanism leading to distrust	The critical need to reform policymaker perspectives	
	The critical need to reflect the consequences of deteriorated urban fabric for state officials	The critical need for resident-stabilizing regulations	The critical need to consider population capacity during incentive planning	The lack of adherence to professional standards	The need to restructure renovation	
	The critical need to reform property valuation structures in these areas	The critical need to reform the renewal process	The critical need for qualitative measurement of regulations	Ownership disputes	The need to eliminate individualism	
	The critical need to obtain construction permits and cost	The need for process-oriented and ongoing intervention	The lack of enforcement of incentive codes	The critical need to systematize resettlement procedures	The need to teach renewal culture	
		The need to create legal infrastructure that supports renovation		The critical neglect of psychological factors in planning	The need to account for political-economic drivers	

Questions	Cluster Layered Analysis (CLA)					
	Layer 1	Layer 2			Layer 3	Layer 4
<p>evaluations before contracts</p> <p>The critical need to prioritize renovation funding</p> <p>The mismatch between official and real estate prices</p> <p>The critical need to preserve the transactional value in contracts</p>	<p>The need to shift the view of residents as "capital" of neighborhoods</p> <p>The need for legal authority to resolve undocumented properties</p> <p>The critical need to prioritize problem-solving</p> <p>The critical need for judiciary involvement</p> <p>The critical need for inter-branch collaboration</p> <p>The critical need to separate deedless areas from those with proper documentation</p> <p>The critical need for the government to fulfill its obligations</p> <p>The need to leverage the negotiation capacity of city council members</p> <p>The critical need to reform the cultural mindset of officials</p> <p>The critical need to build institutional structures that empower residents</p> <p>The need for smart field surveys every 2 years</p> <p>The critical need to reduce administrative bureaucracy</p>	<p>The lack of unified practices across districts</p> <p>The critical need to prevent insider information misuse</p> <p>The critical need for long-term planning</p> <p>The critical need to reform current support practices</p> <p>The critical need to combat rent-seeking behaviors</p> <p>The critical need to reform preferential access to services</p> <p>The critical need to prioritize corridor widening files</p> <p>The critical need for special municipal support in road-opening projects</p> <p>The critical need for uniformity in licensing and permit processes</p> <p>The critical need for compliance with regulations</p> <p>The critical need to fight administrative corruption</p> <p>The critical need to reform administrative culture</p> <p>The critical need to develop stable residency through policy</p>	<p>The critical need to curb speculative behavior</p> <p>The critical need to incorporate "right to the city" into commissions and workgroups</p> <p>The critical need to reform policies in support of underprivileged neighborhoods</p> <p>The need to fix informality-enabling practices</p> <p>The need to differentiate between informal and formal property claims</p> <p>The lack of priority for blighted or unclassified zones</p> <p>The critical need to consider international insurance mechanisms</p> <p>The lack of identity creation for neighborhoods</p> <p>The critical need to control urban expansion</p> <p>The critical need to deepen theoretical understanding of renewal</p> <p>The critical need to popularize the concept of comprehensive renewal</p> <p>The critical need for continuous knowledge development</p>	<p>The need to depoliticize the structure</p> <p>The need to promote a problem-solving culture</p> <p>The need to reform the state's income-seeking role</p> <p>The need to build dialogue around renovation</p> <p>The need to reduce the culture of revenue-maximization</p> <p>The need to combat excessive demands</p> <p>The need to update regulatory frameworks</p> <p>The need to reform intellectual approaches</p> <p>The need to stay current</p> <p>The need to account for macroeconomic causes</p> <p>The influence of political action on discourse</p> <p>The critical need to reform renovation's function</p>		

Questions	Cluster Layered Analysis (CLA)				
	Layer 1	Layer 2		Layer 3	Layer 4
		<p>The lack of public awareness</p> <p>The critical need to move away from profit-centered mindsets</p> <p>The critical need to enforce renovation laws</p> <p>The critical need to raise awareness among managers</p> <p>The critical need to identify key policy drivers</p> <p>The critical need for socio-demographic insight in policy</p> <p>The lack of prioritization for livability and environmental quality</p> <p>The critical need to break one-dimensional policymaker thinking</p>	<p>The critical need for proper public understanding of renewal and deteriorated areas</p> <p>The critical need to use cutting-edge knowledge in planning</p> <p>The critical need to recognize existing local structures</p> <p>The importance of spatial flexibility</p> <p>The importance of diverse negotiating power</p> <p>The critical need to include cultural/social factors in regulation drafting</p> <p>The lack of effective legal deterrents</p> <p>Passive urban management</p>	<p>The critical need for affordability in renovation</p> <p>The critical need to avoid coercive power</p> <p>The critical need to address power relations</p> <p>The critical need to reform decision-making systems</p>	

Questions	Cluster Layered Analysis (CLA)					
	Layer 1	Layer 2			Layer 3	Layer 4
<p>What are the renovation actors' conflicts resolution reasons of dilapidated urban areas of Tehran?</p>	<p>Lack of government and municipal involvement</p> <p>Rising land prices</p> <p>Critical need to reform current financial evaluation systems for investors</p> <p>Critical need to fix pre-investor funding systems</p> <p>Critical need to audit and freeze project accounts</p> <p>Critical need to redefine projects with attention to investor capacity</p> <p>Government's failure to fulfill obligations (e.g., fee reimbursements)</p>	<p>Necessity of neighborhood-centric criteria</p> <p>Critical need to consider different levels of people's expectations in different regions</p> <p>Critical need to recognize the right to root</p> <p>Critical need for institutional consensus</p> <p>Lack of public trust</p> <p>Reform the way regions are evaluated</p> <p>Reform the political structure</p> <p>Critical need to create legal infrastructure</p> <p>Critical need to promote a culture of modernization</p> <p>Non-commitment/removal of responsibility/evasion of the government towards renovation</p> <p>Reform the structure of how regions are evaluated</p>	<p>The critical need to reform the island institutional structure of modernization</p> <p>The need to raise awareness of the consequences of excessive modernization</p> <p>The critical need to raise awareness of the consequences of unilateral agreements as the spirit of the times</p> <p>The critical need to improve and improve the public's mental image of the municipality</p> <p>The need to create and improve social capital</p> <p>The critical need to be able to plan the allocation of facilities</p> <p>The critical need to prevent momentary management and portfolio building</p> <p>The critical need to reduce the bargaining power of capital</p> <p>The critical need to prevent the interpretation of laws</p> <p>The critical need to improve the knowledge and insight awareness of actors</p> <p>The critical need to localize theories and approaches when solving problems</p> <p>The lack of priority for crime prevention and deterrence in laws</p> <p>Legal obsolescence and discontinuity</p>	<p>Failure to provide legal training packages for owners</p> <p>Prolonged and time-consuming handling of legal claims</p> <p>Charging legal fees from owners</p> <p>Critical need to be aware of financial processes (submission of settlements)</p> <p>Lack of trust between institutions</p> <p>Imbalance of actors</p> <p>Lack of formalization (systemization) of the renovation process</p>	<p>The critical need to reform current modernization practices</p> <p>Reforming the municipality's revenue philosophy of existence</p> <p>The critical need to reform the abandonment of modernization</p> <p>The critical need to control the unbridledness of capital</p> <p>The continuity and consistency of capital</p> <p>Capitalist domination and slavery</p> <p>The critical need to reform the dysfunctional structures governing the Iranian economy</p> <p>The critical need to prevent institutional fragmentation</p>	<p>The rhetorical façade of government support slogans</p> <p>There discrepancy between governmental slogans and actual policy implementation</p>
<p>How and based on what model could resolve the conflict between effective actors in the renovation process of dilapidated urban areas of Tehran?</p>	<p>Creating sustainable municipal income</p> <p>The need to regulate profits/income from renovation</p> <p>The need to regulate added value and surplus value in renovation</p>	<p>The critical need for smartization in order to obtain the opinions of the people and space users</p> <p>The critical need to obtain a regulatory approval for renovation/housing</p> <p>The critical need to legalize the fulfillment/payment of</p>	<p>The critical need to systemize the rules</p> <p>The critical need to build social capacity</p> <p>The critical need to regulate the direction of the capital market towards modernization</p> <p>The critical need to systemize the allocation of facilities</p>	<p>Not abandoning renovation, carrying out quasi-renovation or renovation of the village</p> <p>Consolidating the public interest in order to make renovation justice-oriented</p> <p>The critical need to reform the institutional structure of renovation</p>	<p>The critical need to activate existential idealism in institutions/society (social cohesion)</p> <p>The critical need to sensitize society to modernization</p> <p>The critical need for flexibility in approaches</p>	<p>The formulation of slogans should be informed by an understanding of actor conflict resolution dynamics</p>

Questions	Cluster Layered Analysis (CLA)					
	Layer 1	Layer 2			Layer 3	Layer 4
	<p>The need to manage land values at the level of their expectations in renovation</p> <p>The need to prepare a norm (reasonable list) of neighborhood-based privileges for regional renovation</p>	<p>social responsibility of space users</p> <p>The priority of positive discrimination in order to provide per capita funds</p> <p>The critical need to stabilize allocated costs (separate account) to provide services</p> <p>The need to define, promote and spend on public benefit</p> <p>The critical need to reform the legal structure and smartize the renovation process in order to prevent abuse of the bargaining power of actors</p> <p>Regulating the bargaining power of actors</p> <p>The critical need to form a Supreme Renovation Council consisting of 3 branches</p> <p>The critical need for institutional exchange of opinions</p> <p>The need to carry out balanced renovation (taking into account economic logic in defining projects)</p>	<p>The critical need to reform the modernization procedure by adjusting the possibility of investor abuse</p> <p>The critical need to systemize the assignment of projects/systematic registration of contracts</p> <p>Reform the support procedure according to the project conditions</p> <p>Provide a justice-based/centered mechanism</p> <p>Focus on turning the problem into an issue</p> <p>Reform the production of cultural content</p> <p>The critical need for institutional flexibility (reform the institutional attitude)</p>	<p>The critical need to realize coordinated and integrated management</p> <p>Prioritizing active and civilizing action by strengthening civic life</p> <p>The critical need to consider the policy package (duties of municipalities and the government in various laws for urban development)</p> <p>The critical need to utilize existing institutional capacities</p>	<p>The critical need to prepare the space to realize structural transformation</p> <p>The critical need to create a discourse to solve structural problems</p> <p>The critical need to create a platform to create the required discourse</p> <p>Adhering to honesty with the people</p> <p>Reforming the country's political system towards group and network management</p>	

In light of the preceding discussions, it becomes evident that within contemporary urban theory, the notion of urban renewal extends beyond a narrowly defined physical transformation of the built environment. Instead, it is increasingly conceptualized as a dynamic set of interrelated processes and power relations that produce socio-spatial transformations across multiple scales. This theoretical shift reflects a movement away from traditional, form-based interpretations of urban change toward a more nuanced understanding that integrates political, cultural, and institutional dimensions. Against this backdrop, the present study aimed to interrogate the evolving theoretical landscape that has emerged around the concept of urban renewal. To deepen this inquiry and uncover the nested complexities of the concept, the research employed Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) as a critical methodological tool. CLA

facilitated the examination of urban renewal across multiple discursive levels—from surface-level empirical narratives to deeper worldviews and cultural metaphors—thereby enabling a multi-dimensional reading of the concept's application in Tehran. Through this layered analysis, the study captured a spectrum of interpretations and tensions embedded in expert and practitioner discourse. These included both structural contradictions and areas of discursive convergence, reflecting the contested and plural nature of how urban renewal is understood and operationalized in practice. Ultimately, this approach illuminated the deeper causes and ideational frameworks that shape policy orientations and stakeholder interactions in the context of Tehran's urban transformation. The findings indicate that a correct understanding of the interest 'conflicts between urban renewal actors' concept, which

depends on solving structural and institutional challenges, could know as the key to achieving justice-oriented urban renewal.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study makes significant theoretical and practical contributions by examining how Tehran's complex political-administrative landscape and fragmented institutional structure shape power relations and discursive conflicts in dilapidated neighborhood renewal. The research highlights the importance of discursive agency in shaping urban futures and suggests justice-oriented interventions, including empowering participatory platforms, mediating contested narratives, enhancing cross-institutional coordination, and integrating deliberative conflict resolution mechanisms. These recommendations aim to foster more democratic, inclusive, and culturally grounded urban renewal processes in Tehran and similar urban contexts. Future studies should focus on longitudinal research to analyze the dynamics of actor interactions and the long-term impacts of policies, enabling a more comprehensive examination of how reforms in governance and financial structures can balance public and private interests. Comparative studies between Tehran and other metropolises facing similar challenges can also provide deeper insights into both local and global urban renewal issues, offering adaptable strategies for inclusive and justice-oriented governance. Moreover, employing ethnographic and participatory methods can shed light on residents' lived experiences and socio-cultural perceptions, highlighting the role of informal institutions and local knowledge in shaping renewal policies. Interdisciplinary approaches that integrate urban planning, political economy, and critical discourse analysis can offer a comprehensive theoretical framework that simultaneously considers structural, cultural, and power relations, thereby steering urban renewal policies toward justice and transformative change.

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