



Sustainable urban regeneration through cultural diversities, Tehran, Iran

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ABSTRACT

Background and objectives: Urban regeneration is a clear mirror that reflects urban thinking and planning in every national system. This process in Iranian cities is quite different from the other cities in the world. Many factors have been important in this process, but a major issue was socio-cultural groups and nationalities like it has seen and studied at Montreal, Canada by author. The aim of this paper is to reconsider city sustainable development theory by analyzing urban regeneration processes with emphasis on cultural diversity or internal ethnic groups in Tehran. **Methods:** An analytical-qualitative framework is used to acquire an understanding of the specifications involved. Through impartial observations on two cities (Tehran and Montreal) over more than five years, this paper attempts to understand the effects of cultural-ethnic groups as social capitals on changing urban spaces. **Findings:** The results revealed that there are not any real multicultural cities in Iran and Tehran is a sample of local-internal multicultural city which its people are not serious social capitals or human forces in urban planning, implementation, and changes. Therefore, cultural capitals, which are consequential to urban regeneration process, as in the case of Montreal, have not been formed in Tehran. **Conclusion:** These findings may provide urban policy-makers in Iran and Tehran with social important facts for regeneration planning development, which helps to improve social capitals of cultural-ethnic groups .

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1. Introduction

Urbanization is an ongoing process in all the cities of the world and urban cultural heritage is a crucial element in the development of these cities and it has an important impact on the quality of life (Dumitrescu, 2014). However, it is known that low quality of life in urban areas generally generates a lot of social, cultural, and economic consequences, which cause serious problems for dwellers and urban managers (Fanni, 2014). One of these urban challenges is the regeneration of public spaces to encompass different socio-cultural groups with varied desires and needs. Today, one can see a shift in approaches from civil engineering/construction programs to a combined social, cultural and economic phenomenon known as regeneration (UNESCO, 2016).

In the UNESCO's Declaration of Principles on Tolerance (UNESCO, 1995), the rich diversity of human culture is greatly stressed. The keyword in UNESCO's definition of tolerance is diversity, and tolerance is a positive attitude towards this diversity. Later on, in the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, UNESCO (2002) re-emphasizes the significance of diversity. Also, the potential of arts activity as a tool for urban regeneration has been widely discussed since the early 1980s (Garcia, 2007). Since then there has been a major shift towards globalization and a knowledge-based economy and the industrial city has been declining (Sasaki, 2004 & 2010). Today, over half of the world's population is living in urban areas. So the path of sustainable development passes through cities (Bokova, 2016).

Culture lies at the heart of urban space renewal. Therefore, cultural groups have leading roles in this renewal or regeneration. It seems that this important trend should be translated into more effective policies and sustainable urban governance. The cities of Iran, in particular, need this essential attention, and therefore, they must strengthen their capital and cultural heritages to become the cultural capitals and provide a sense of identity, opportunities for creativity, and prosperity. However, they differ in cultural diversity from other countries; for example, Tehran contains 8 linguistic, cultural-ethnic groups that are, for the sake of national unity, called Iranians (Blessi et al., 2012). Moreover, Madanipour (2011) illustrates how urban renaissance and regeneration fueled major property investment in British city centers, which favored speculative upmarket residential development as well as retail and

entertainment spaces. In addition, some authors put emphasis on diversity as a central issue in academic and policy debates concerning social cohesion (Omit. Ahmadi, 2018). Perhaps the first sociologist who defined a cultural-ethnic group as a cultural minority was Louis Wirth. He defined it as a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination (Shepard, 2013). According to this definition, Vrdoljak (2005) divided the concept of cultural minority into three main stages by considering the importance placed on cultural diversity for attaining stability and prosperity by the international community and individual countries (Fig. 1).

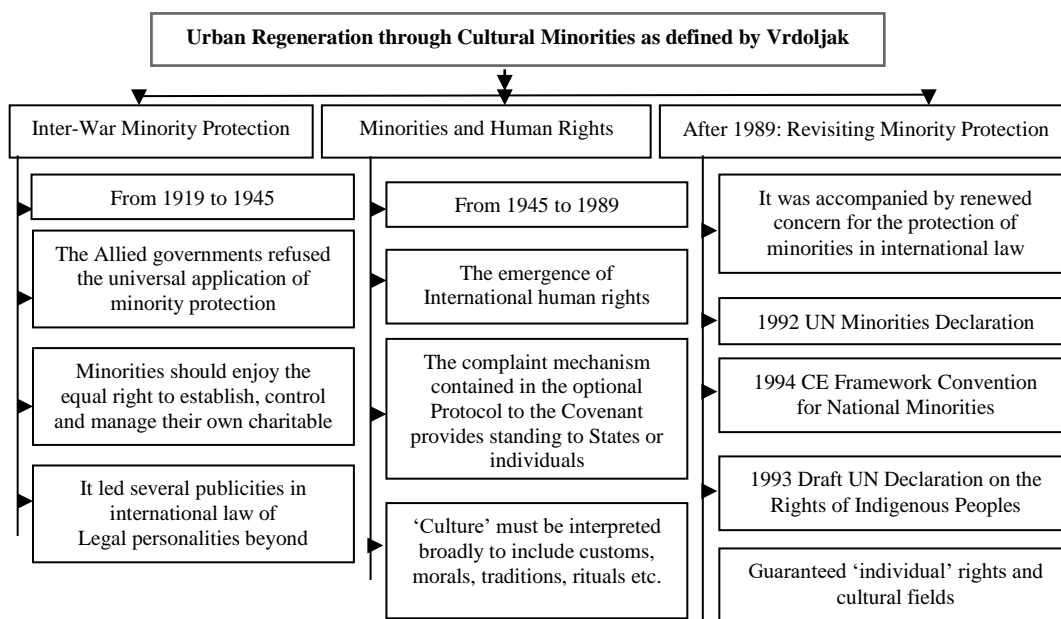


Fig. 1. Urban Regeneration through Cultural Minorities as defined by Vrdoljak

It has been argued that many elements and situations affect the formation of cultural-ethnic groups in cities. For instance, it can be said that Marxist-inspired analyses, such as Smith (1996) and Harvey (2013), have emphasized the role of capital as urban property in the process of attracting cultural groups to cities. Liberal analyses, instead, tend to stress the role of consumer's demands (Oakley, 2015), the elite and graded occupation structure, especially in inner sections by middle-class income earners.

However, Grodach and Silver (2015) attempted to bring both these aspects together and deal with them as mutually fundamental factors of urban regeneration processes. In addition, Madanipour (2016) argued that in most of the related debates, tolerance is the attitude expected to be shown by the majority, and its political manifestation towards a minority. Globally, there are conflicts between sustainable development, the economy, and urban regeneration which they result in trends toward culture and its diversity in cities. Based

on author's experience, the main reason for axial study of urban regeneration approach by urban researchers and planners throughout the world is that this field is able to consider and integrate all economic, cultural, social, environmental and physical aspects to unify a city structure. One specific kind of urban regeneration is shaped by Iranian cultural-ethnic groups in cities like Tehran. However, it may be started and continued by various native people in each neighborhood. In general, there is no certain attitude or school of thought that leads to a new movement in urban regeneration in Iran. So, Iranian cities are far from any regeneration process on the bases of global cultural diversity. The aim of this research is to reconsider city sustainable development by analyzing urban regeneration processes with emphasis on cultural diversity or internal ethnic groups in Tehran. This study has been started from 2010 to 2018 and with emphasis on two cities Tehran and Montreal.

2. Material and Methods

The discussion in this paper is based firmly on the real world, selecting the most pertinent issues raised from many observations and interviews. The main research question is that how cultural-ethnic groups can affect urban regeneration in Iran? A varied range of urban districts in Tehran city was chosen to explore the influences of cultural threats on city regeneration and urban transformations. The study districts were chosen in a systematic manner because of the great distribution of Iranian cultural groups throughout Tehran city. As a result, 35 persons (mostly women) of these cultural-ethnic groups in different regions of Tehran city, have participated in the survey. Also, some interviews were conducted recently in Tehran, thanks to the collaboration of some master students. The sampling was done by snowball method and there were 35 interviewees. The interviews mainly contained 5 questions about the subjects' place of origin, their reasons for immigration, what they do as members of this specific culture, whether they identify any urban changes which have occurred or have been influenced through their actions or not, and what they think and feel about their cultural interests in urban spaces. As an impartial observer in two cities (Tehran, as a native, and Montreal, as a visiting researcher) over more than five years, also

have made an attempt to understand the effects of cultural-ethnic groups on changing urban spaces.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Cultural capitals and urban regeneration

Over the last three decades there is the rise of a specifically urban forms of cultural policy (Grodach and Silver, 2015). As it has been known, urban regeneration is the story of interaction and sometimes of conflict between economic and cultural preferences. This means that people are one of its main points of connection. Heritage resources within local urban regeneration are matters of preserving some structures (Ashworth, 2017). Therefore, urban regeneration has occurred to change the patterns and points of view which dominate political-economic systems and social transformations. So, a cultural approach draws the main baselines for urban regeneration globally (Madanipour, 2011). However, this trend isn't visible in Tehran and other cities in Iran. This means that there are no citizenship laws and rights, so city dwellers are not serious factors in planning, implementation and change. Therefore, cultural capitals, which are consequential to urban regeneration process, have not been formed in Tehran. As many experts admit, this is due to class gaps (Shalchi et al., 2016), specific multiculturalism (Fazeli and Rasouli, 2013), and certain social inequalities between the North and South of Tehran (Fanni, 2019), which are all the main social characteristics of this city. In addition, Leary Owhin (2016) have explained how urban spaces are places of cultural-social differentiations and competitions between social groups; therefore, it can be said that Iranian cities are being made and represented by a number of cultural-social forces and actors with many differences among them, especially in the case of cultural groups. As it has been known, the processes of production, management, and control of urban spaces have led to the exclusion and marginalization of many cultural groups (Tibbot, 2002; Low et al., 2005). Recently, the function of culture in urban regeneration is connected to many factors and has changed scientifically (Omit. Shabani and Izadi, 2014). The ideas and projects of cultural-ethnic groups have not led to rethinking and restructuring the policies

related to culture, industries and sustainable development which have, undoubtedly, a great impact on urban regeneration. It is remarkable that in Iran, in general, and in Tehran, in particular, there are no cultural minorities in the usual sense of the term. They are actually

linguistic-ethnic parts of Iranian nationality and identity. They have migrated and settled in the 22 districts of Tehran from various parts of Iran and so they are called “Tehranian” now (tab. 1).

Table 1. Tehran population by the place of birth (2006-2016)

Description of items	2006		2016*	
	Population	Percentage	Population	Percentage
Tehran province population	13,422,366	100%	16,183,391	100%
Born in Tehran province	6,297,055	46.91	8,356,064	51.6
Born in other provinces (urban & rural areas of Iran)	5,672,201	42.2	3,453,328	21.33
Foreign born (in other countries)	216,688	1.6	350,341	2.16
Total national immigrants to Tehran	2,989,500	22.22	4,684,241	28.94
Total foreign immigrants to Iran (1996-2016)	260,495	1.94	330,416	2.04
Total foreign immigrants to Tehran province	51,636	0.38	108,456	0.67

Source: Data adapted and modifies from <https://www.amar.org.ir>, 2006-2016

*The latest National Census in Iran

As the tab. 1 shows, the trend of aboriginals in Tehran were increased from 46.91 in 2006 to 51.6 in 2016 and the unoriginal (foreign born) has increased from 1.6 to 2.16 percent in that period. Also, the total national immigrants to Tehran became larger from 22.22 to 28.94 that is much higher than the total national immigrants to Iran (1.94 - 2.04). The total foreign immigrants to Tehran province also has increased from 0.38 to 0.67 percent which show a bit growth and low attracts of this city for foreign people. This trend show clearly, Tehran has absorbed the highest rate of national immigrants. Hence, the most immigrants in this city have Iranian origin and they live just like everyone else in Iran, but they do not have specific voices or activities influencing urban decision making etc. Indeed,

they constitute the Iranian Local-National Identities (tab. 2), which means, there are many linguistic-cultural groups in Tehran that are potentially strong producers of cultural capital. However there isn't official data about population of religious sectarians in Iran, but Iran's formal religion is Islam (%99.4) which %9 of them are Sunni (Gittis, 2019); the rest are Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian and others. It is a fact that the homogenous religious structure in Iran has been the most essential factor in identifying the national identity than linguistic-ethnic origin. As table 2 shows, there are limited data about linguistic-ethnic groups in Iran that has cleared a declined trend in all ethnic groups except in Mazandarani, Gilak, Baloch and Kurd (tab. 2).

Table 2. Ethnic language groups in Iran, 2006 - 2016*

Ethnic group (Iranians)	Language	2006		2016	
		(%)	Population	(%)	Population
Persian/Fars	Persian/Farsi	34.5	24.829.650	30.8	25.354.852
Azari	Azari Turkish	25.7	18.496.290	24.50	20.134.541
Kurd	Kurdish	10	7.197.000	9.90	8.137.146
Lure & Bakhtiari	Luri & Bakhtiari	8	5.757.600	5.6	4.658.426
Arab	Arabic	4.8	3.454.560	3.4	2.854.634
Mazandarani	Mazandarani	4.4	3.166.680	7.76	6.376.341
Gilak	Gilaki	3.2	2.303.040	4.45	3.659.412
Baloch	Balochi	3	2.159.100	5.5	4.561.341
Kurd	Kurmanji (of Khorasan)	2	1.501.370	3.05	2.510.365

Turkmen	Turkmeni	1.2	863.640	1.21	1.000.000
Taleshi	Taleshi	1	699.100	0.98	810.000
Qashghayi	Qashghayi Turkish	0.8	575.760	0.74	610.654
Others	Others	1.5	1.018.180	1.82	1.500.010
Sum		100	71.970.000	100%	82,167,722

Source: Iranian Statistic Center <https://www.amar.org.ir>

*The latest National Census in Iran

There are just some foreign minor cultural groups (foreign nationals) like Afghans, Iraqis, and Lebanese, who gradually came to Tehran after the Islamic Revolution at 1975 (Fanni, 2006). Moreover, the number of those arriving as refugees is increasing after the formation of the Islamic state of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). They are already living in Tehran without considerable effects on urban decisions and changes. Their footprints in the city are the slightest of tracks, such as micro trades and religious ceremonies. Additionally, nowadays main Iranian universities, like the University of Tehran and Shahid Beheshti University (formerly called National University), have

enrolled international students mainly from Afghanistan, Iraq, Senegal, and Nigeria. So, some neighborhoods in Tehran have become main dwelling areas for them, like Dolat Abad neighborhood, which is the main abode of Iraqi immigrants who have their own religious and linguistic symbols, such as their own mosques. However, like other cultural-ethnic groups, they do not have any noticeable effects on that neighborhood's programs (Salehi Amiri and Azimi, 2012). Also, the findings shown that 35 interviewees were from Iranian ethnic groups: Azari, Kurd, Mazandarani, Arab, and Lure originally. They had similar responses to research's 5 questions as follow: (tab. 3).

Table 3. Research samples and interviews, Tehran, 2018-2019

Place of origin	Number of sample	The reasons for immigration to Tehran	What they do as members of this specific culture	thoughts and feels about their cultural interests in urban spaces	to identify any urban changes which have occurred or have been influenced through their actions
Azari	12				
Kurd	8				
Mzandarani	6	%76 seeking the better job & well-being; %19 for relatives; and %5 after Iraq-Iran war.	%89 said: Nothing specials and %11 have said; they have done just limited cultural ceremonies in the family scale	All of them declared that they have not main formal experiences or official participations in the urban events at neighborhoods. So, they have not influenced by any municipality's events.	some of them have argued sadly that they missed their cultural identities and feelings because of lack of multicultural thinking and policy in urban planning and reproductions; someone have believed that they are living with constant cultural-ethnic feels and also, they trying to improve the neighborhood's spaces basis on cultural assets and social capitals regularly and restrictedly.
Lure	5				
Arab	4				
Sum	35				

Source: Results of interviews

The table 3 has been set basis on 35 reviews with some of dwellers of neighborhoods in Tehran's districts. It has contained responses to five research questions as follow:

1) Place of origin: there were 12 Azari, 8 Kurd, 6 Mzandarani, 5 Lure and 4 persons Arab.

2) The reasons for immigration to Tehran: %76 seeking the better job & well-being; %19 for relatives; and %5 after Iraq-Iran war.

3) What they do as members of this specific culture: %89 said: Nothing specials and %11 have said; they have done just limited cultural ceremonies in the family scale.

4) Whether they identify any urban changes which have occurred or have been influenced through their actions: All of them declared that they have not main formal experiences or official participations in the urban events at neighborhoods. So, they have not influenced by any municipality's' events.

5) What they think and feel about their cultural interests in urban spaces: some of them have argued sadly that they missed their cultural identities and feelings because of lack of multicultural thinking and policy in urban planning and reproductions; someone have believed that they are living with constant cultural-ethnic feels and also, they trying to improve the neighborhood's spaces basis on cultural assets and social capitals regularly and restrictedly.

3.2. Unification in internal diversity: Specific religious identity

As far as religion is concerned, there is a religious cohesion in Iran. Although the Shia branch of Islam predominates in Iran, all other religious groups (i.e. Sunnis, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians) emphasize their belonging to Iranian identity. It must be said that if the social-political space of a city opens up to all ethnic and cultural groups, they will be much more creative, and their impacts on urban improvements will be greater than when they are not seen. Therefore, in single ritual and mono-ethnic communities, diverse ethnic groups cannot provide a variety of activities and functions and, as a result, urban spaces cannot experience these dynamics and tangible progresses. As a matter of fact, Iranian micro-cultures have not produced strong cultural capitals which are important factors in the physical, economic and social regeneration of Tehran. According to literature review and scientific observations of author, cultural-ethnic groups have become increasingly important for urban plans and strategies designed to deal with the new trajectories of urban areas. In this respect, culture has been used as a "tool" to revive dismantled industrial and waterfront sites and derelict areas and as a territorial marketing instrument for a better placing of the city in the post-industrial global marketplace. Therefore, recent development in Montreal has been influenced by cultural groups who are sophisticatedly making social-cultural capitals and urban spaces. However,

Tehran city has not organized or managed how the cultural groups can be active in shaping cultural neighborhoods legally (Balibrea, 2001). Therefore, they are not allowed to and do not have any spatial effects in the neighborhoods. Most of the interviewees originated from one of the provinces of Iran; this means they are native Iranians and only a few have come from other countries, like Afghanistan or Iraq. The latter immigrated to Tehran seeking a peaceful place to live; most of them are refugees and they have been living here for more than 10 years. Most of the interviewees have their own private jobs, but a few Lebanese and many of the ones with Iranian cultural identities have governmental jobs. The participants also mentioned that, while they belong to a specific race or micro-culture, they constitute a part of and are coherent with Iranian society and culture. Therefore, they are accounted for as Iranians and so, they do not have any culturally distinct role in urban decision making, implementation processes and hence shaping neighborhood spaces. They declare that they are interested in performing their own cultural activities and ceremonies or having their own specific schools, and so on. However, they participate, as micro-cultures of Iran, in some of the national ceremonies held by the Iranian Ministry of Culture annually around the New Year event.

3.3. The modern transformation in Tehran

Generally, the socio-economic and political situation of Tehran (as the main national metropolis) is completely different from other cities. This national metropolis covers many diversities and differences so that there is a big cultural gap between this city and others. For instance, certain modern concepts such as civil/urban rights, animal's, children's, women's and environmental rights are growing, and as a result, several institutions have been established and NGOs have been formed in these fields. However, my interviews and observations revealed that there are not any real multicultural cities in Iran like Canada and Tehran is a sample of local-internal multicultural city which its people are not serious social capitals or human forces in urban planning, implementation, and changes. Also, it has been seen deep interchanges in other parts of Tehran; for example, as it can be

seen in table 1, during 2006 and 2016, the native population rate of Tehran increased from 46.91 percent to 51.6 percent. Marefat (2006) in a case study of Tehran, makes it very clear that it must pay close attention to the twin force of culture and politics. As a historian, she reveals the dynamics of historical changes. After the Islamic Revolution, deep social, economic, and cultural differences increased between the capital city (Tehran) and other cities (Fanni, 2006). These differences can be attributed to urban mismanagement.

4. Conclusion

The main reason behind a considerable amount of studies in the field of urban regeneration by urban researchers and planners in the world, is that this phenomenon will be able to consider and integrate all economic, cultural, social, environmental and physical aspects in unifying city structure. The cultural diversity in Iranian cities differs from other countries and then this has launched a new urban regeneration trend; however, this is not motivating and improving urban sustainability in Iran. Tehran city has its own distinct cultural movement or trend in the field of urban regeneration through cultural groups. As a result, Iranian cities in general and Tehran in particular, while benefitting from different ethnic groups, still have a very long distance towards sustainable regeneration, because they do not have the necessary infrastructures for that process, such as cultural-social functions. These roles come from the diversity of peoples with a variety of innovative ideas, desires, occupations and effects. In Tehran city, dwellers are not serious factors or human forces in planning, implementation and changes. Therefore, cultural capitals, which are consequential to the urban regeneration process, have not been formed in this metropolis. Furthermore, different ethnic groups in culturally homogeneous neighborhoods of Tehran still do not have relevant impacts during spatial changes in them. Therefore, pluralist public cultures, like those created in other countries; have not been formed and so, sustainable public spaces have not been created in Iranian cities. The findings of this research may provide urban policy-makers in Iran and Tehran with social important facts for regeneration planning

development, which helps to improve social capitals of cultural-ethnic groups.

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Conflict of interest

Author declare that the submitted manuscript is the author' original work, has not received prior publication and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere, permission has been received to use any material in the manuscript much as tables, figures etc. or no permissions have necessary to publish the author' work .

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