

Original Article

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Pathology of process and content of the tehran comprehensive plan (2007): a systematic review based on meta-synthesis and thematic frequency analysis

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Abstract

The Strategic-Structural Plan for Development and Urbanism of Tehran (Tehran Comprehensive Plan - 2007), one of the most prominent efforts in Iranian urban planning, was formulated to overcome the failures of previous plans by adopting a new approach. As the plan's horizon (2026) approaches, and considering the criticisms raised since its inception, a comprehensive review and pathology have become evident. This research provides a frequency analysis of themes and a systematic meta-synthesis of previous studies to explain the challenges and shortcomings of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007) and to categorize the proposed solutions for its improvement. This study, using a systematic review method, examined 123 relevant scholarly documents (articles, theses, research projects, and books) published between 2001 and 2023. The data were extracted based on an analytical framework focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the preparation process, content, approval, monitoring, implementation barriers, and feasibility solutions. Data analysis was conducted using a combination of quantitative methods (thematic frequency analysis to identify the frequency of themes) and qualitative methods (meta-synthesis based on content analysis and three-stage coding).

The quantitative analysis revealed that previous studies placed a much greater emphasis on the plan's weaknesses (approximately 60% of codes) compared to its strengths (around 7%). Proposed solutions constituted roughly 32% of the codes. The highest frequency of the criticisms belonged to procedural, managerial, and content-related weaknesses. The qualitative analysis (meta-synthesis) grouped the main issues into three categories: procedural weaknesses (e.g., institutional failure, lack of coordination, inadequate participation, consultant selection), content-related weaknesses (e.g., lack of theoretical basis, insufficient data, ignoring key issues like city boundaries and housing, internal inconsistencies), and managerial and implementation weaknesses (e.g., poor inter-sector cooperation, financial issues, ineffective monitoring). The proposed solutions primarily emphasized content and approach-related reforms (attention to environment, heritage, housing, justice), procedural and methodological reforms (standardized methodology, databases, genuine participation), and strengthening implementation and monitoring mechanisms (sustainable institutionalization, financial resources, legal requirements, continuous monitoring).

Keywords

Meta-synthesis
Pathology
Systematic Review
Tehran Comprehensive Plan

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1. Introduction

Cities, as central hubs of development and human activity, always require comprehensive and effective planning to ensure their sustainable growth and development. In Iran, urban comprehensive plans have served as key tools for spatial and physical planning of cities for decades. However, past experiences show that many of these plans have faced serious challenges during their preparation, approval, implementation, and monitoring stages, which have often prevented them from fully achieving their initial goals and expectations.

The strategic-structural plan for the development and urbanism of Tehran, known as the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007), was developed as a milestone in Iranian urban planning, aiming to address past shortcomings by adopting a new approach. This plan was rooted in conceptual shifts in urban planning, aiming to establish a more flexible and comprehensive framework for managing the Tehran metropolis. Despite this, since its development and approval, numerous criticisms have emerged from specialists, researchers, and even executive bodies regarding its process, content, feasibility, and monitoring.

As the plan's horizon approaches (2026) and the need for reviewing and creating a new master plan grows, conducting a thorough and scientific analysis of the 2007 Comprehensive Plan becomes essential. While many studies have sporadically explored various aspects of this plan, a comprehensive, systematic review analyzing these studies through thematic frequency and meta-synthesis is notably absent. Such research, by consolidating existing knowledge and identifying recurring patterns in strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and proposed solutions, can provide a solid foundation for future decision-making in urban planning for Tehran and other metropolises in the country.

Therefore, this study aims to perform a systematic thematic frequency analysis and meta-synthesis of all previous research related to the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007). It seeks to answer key questions: What are the most significant strengths and weaknesses of the process and content of the 2007 plan? What major challenges have arisen during its implementation? And what solutions have been proposed to enhance and improve future comprehensive plans? By employing thematic frequency analysis and meta-synthesis methods, this research aims to provide a comprehensive and integrated overview of the

underlying issues and insights in this crucial urban planning document.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Research Background

2.1. Urban Planning and Comprehensive Plans

In Iran, comprehensive and detailed plans are deemed legal tools for urban planners to direct and manage physical city development. According to the law on renaming the Ministry of Development and Housing (1972), a comprehensive plan is a long-term document that determines land use, zoning, public facility needs, communication lines, transportation hubs, renovation and rehabilitation zones, and regulations for preserving historic and natural sites, as well as controlling density. Despite their legal support, these plans often struggle to secure commitment from municipalities, and their actual effectiveness has been lower than expected (Imani Jajarmi, 2016).

Urban comprehensive plans, as one of the key master documents in urban planning, are considered a tool to implement urban policies and development programs (Tehran Urban Planning and Research Center, 2007). They aim to organize the city's physical and spatial structure and meet citizens' needs (Tehran Urban Planning and Research Center, 2007). The primary purpose of these plans is to manage land use and construction as well as control and track urban development (APUR, 2005). Tehran's urban planning history highlights that the first comprehensive plan was developed in 1968 (APUR, 2005). Over recent decades, Iran's urban system, particularly Tehran, has experienced rapid urbanization and transformation of rural and peripheral areas (Afrakhteh, Shamsi, & Azizpour, 2013). These changes have led to the integration of suburban villages into the urban fabric and the rise of urbanized villages (Afrakhteh et al., 2013). Effective implementation of comprehensive plans depends on master documents, such as national land-use plans, improved policymaking in metropolitan development programs, efficient urban management, and public participation. However, without public engagement and monitoring, Iran's urban development policies and programs have become entangled in large bureaucracies and rent-seeking by public organizations, failing to cope with the conditions of dependent urbanization. Urban growth is driven more by the interests of powerful land and urban rent-seeking groups than by policy frameworks (Imani Jajarmi, 2016).

The first comprehensive plan for Tehran was enacted in 1969, which failed to succeed in practice despite its strengths (Pourmosavi, 2010). Over time, plans like the 1992 organizational plan and the 2006 comprehensive plan (later known as the 2007 plan) were formulated for the city of Tehran (Alikhani, 2008). These plans aimed to enhance the functional and strategic aspects of urban plans and address the growing issues in Tehran (Pourmosavi, 2010). However, achieving these goals depends on legal reforms and the need for better integration in urban management and coordination among city agencies (Pourmosavi, 2010).

2.2. Pathology of Urban Plans

Comprehensive urban plans, as the master and strategic documents, play a key role in shaping the physical and social future of cities. The success of cities relies on complex urban policymaking and planning processes, with the macro-policy environment serving as its foundation (Jalili & Kazemian, 2016). Among these, the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007) stands out as a key development document for the capital, formulated with strategic and structural goals (Boomsazegan, 2007; Mousavi, 2009). However, experience shows that comprehensive plans face challenges and pathologies in the preparation and approval processes, as well as in their proposed content, which hinder the achievement of their objectives (Paksaz, 2009). These pathologies can lead to the urban environment's inability to respond to issues arising from rapid urban transformations, uncontrolled physical expansion, and the failure to achieve urban sustainability (Dadashpoor et al., 2012; Hajizadeh Miran, 2015).

Consequently, conducting a comprehensive and precise pathology of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007) using thematic frequency analysis and meta-synthesis is critical for identifying strengths and weaknesses, understanding causes of failure or success, and proposing improvements for future plans. In urban studies, pathology involves identifying, analyzing, and understanding root causes of problems, weaknesses, and inefficiencies in plans' processes and content. This approach aims to reveal factors behind failure to meet objectives and unintended outcomes. For instance, Javanmardan Park in Tehran, designed as a practical outcome of policies from the 2006 comprehensive plan for organizing the Kan River valley, faced problems after its opening, prompting questions about why such a project, emphasized by master documents, failed (Rezaei et al., 2015). The

pathology of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007) can be examined in two main dimensions: process and content.

A) Procedural Pathologies: These include the lack of coordination between local and macro levels during the simultaneous development of comprehensive and detailed plans (APUR, 2005), deficiencies in supporting studies, such as the absence of comprehensive economic, social, and environmental information (APUR, 2005), lack of attention to public participation, one of the main reasons for the inefficiency of urban development plans (Imani Jajarmi, 2016), and weak management and monitoring of the city's fringes, leading to encroachment by profit-seeking groups and challenges in sustainable fringe management (Amini et al., 2017; Anvari & Daryabari, 2018).

B) Content-related Pathologies: These include a disconnect with the city's realities and discrepancy between detailed plans and comprehensive plans (Tajok et al., 2024), aesthetic and landscape issues and insufficient consideration of high-rise building impacts (Arianmehr et al., 2021), capital accumulation and environmental hazards in Tehran, leading to real estate speculation, land and housing commodification, and uncontrolled construction (Afrakhteh, 2015), and neglecting the role of river valleys in the 1968 comprehensive plan, alongside their potential in shaping spatial organization in the 2006 comprehensive plan (Rezaei et al., 2015).

2.3. Dimensions of Pathology in Comprehensive Urban Plans

The pathology of comprehensive urban plans can be examined from different dimensions. These dimensions include the conceptual, procedural, and content-related aspects of the plans.

A) Conceptual Aspects and Theoretical Changes in Understanding the City: Advances in urban planning theories shape how a city is understood and, in turn, influence the process and content of comprehensive plans. Tehran's urban development plans over time have been created based on various understandings of the city, reflecting transformations in urban planning knowledge, the structure of the urban decision-making system, and the socio-economic-political context of each period (Rahmani & Azizi, 2021). For instance, the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007) emphasizes structural-strategic concepts rather than traditional comprehensive, detailed, master, topical, and thematic plans, indicating a shift in urban planning

approaches (Majedi, 2012). Pathology from this perspective examines whether the dominant understanding of the city in the 2007 plan aligned with the realities and needs of the capital.

B) Procedural Aspects: Urban governance, participation, and accountability during the preparation and approval process of comprehensive plans are crucial to their effectiveness. A lack of transparency, stakeholder involvement, and inadequate responses to public opinion can undermine the plan's success. Studies analyzing critique workshops of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007) highlight the importance of accountability among those preparing the plan (consultants and clients) and the standing of expert opinions (Shokoohi Bidehendi, 2019). Furthermore, analyzing the causes and consequences of deficiencies in integrated management of Tehran's outskirts reveals that the chaotic situation there results from various management shortcomings, which can also be extended to the formulation of the comprehensive plan (Mostoufi & Qalambar Dezfouli, 2021). These studies suggest that procedural pathology should address issues such as conflicts of interest, lack of institutional coordination, and weak participatory mechanisms.

C) Content-related Aspects: Land use, spatial structure, and sustainability. The content of the comprehensive plan—such as land use zoning, defining development limits, and establishing regulations—is critically important. Discrepancies between the plan's content and current realities, citizens' needs, and sustainable development principles can cause numerous problems. In terms of land use and sustainability, the pathology of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007) must assess the sustainability of projected land uses and their alignment with urban sustainability criteria (Zebardast et al., 2011). Regarding spatial structure, the plan should focus on the distribution pattern of population and activity. Studies show that Tehran had an exceptional spatial structure, with a clustered population pattern and a non-clustered activity pattern in 2006 (Davari & Amini, 2023). Regarding growth control and legal boundaries, studies indicate that Tehran's second comprehensive plan failed to effectively regulate urban development, as shown by its low growth containment index (Azizi et al., 2018).

Integration with other documents and plans is also essential. For example, the position of Tehran's river valleys as the city's natural edges has been examined in the master document (the comprehensive plan) (Zehraei Pour & Jafarpoor, 2021). Additionally, conformity with new development models such as Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) can reflect the plan's capacity to address issues like air pollution and traffic (Rahmani et al., 2020).

3. Research Background

The pathology of urban plans necessitates a systemic approach that considers both supra-system dimensions (the city as part of the country's planning system) and sub-system dimensions (development plans as part of the city system and the variables involved in development) (Pourahmad et al., 2006). In this regard, the following variables can be addressed in the pathology of the process and content of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007).

- Inefficiency of the Planning Process: This dimension includes the lack of stakeholder participation, which leads to a diminished role for the public and reduced opportunities for plan implementation (Andalib, 2009), frequent and discretionary changes in the approval process that complicate plan execution (Mansouri, 2016; Fariour & Sadri, 2009), institutional and managerial weaknesses, the absence of a strong urban development planning body (Andalib, 2009), and the marginal role of consulting engineers and non-systemic approaches that negatively impact the quality of plans (Mansouri, 2016; Ghanbari & Gholami, 2016).

- Content-related Shortcomings of the Plan: These include failure to meet initial objectives and a lack of strategic vision (Mansouri, 2016); lack of coherence and integration among objectives, strategies, and policies (Andalib, 2009); neglect of social and human dimensions (including integrated housing, population, and economic planning) and insufficient consideration of human dignity in urban renewal policies (Mansouri, 2016; Shokoohi Bidehendi & Motahar, 2019); overlooking spatial and social justice (Azizi & Shokoohi Bidehendi, 2015); weakness in anticipating and responding to changes (Farivar & Sadri, 2009), and inadequate attention to public transportation, especially intra-city rail transport (Alizadeh Tabatabaei et al., 2013).

Table 1. Pathology and evaluation of the tehran comprehensive plan (2007)

No.	Author(s) & year	Main research topic	Key findings and results
1	Jalili & Kazemian (2016)	Analysis of the macro policy environment of the strategic-structural plan (Comprehensive Plan) of Tehran.	An imbalanced power mechanism in the joint institution, the superior power of the bureaucratic system, and competition between governmental organizations and the municipality have influenced the policymaking process of the plan.
2	Andalib (2009)	A study of the role and function of the urban development planning institution in Tehran	The institution responsible for plan preparation failed to achieve a legal and stable position, and the delegation of its authorities to the municipality weakened the potential for independent monitoring and inter-sectoral participation.
3	Mansouri (2016)	Critique and review of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007)	Frequent and discretionary changes to the approval process have complicated the implementation of the plan. The failure to achieve initial goals and the absence of a strategic vision are among the content-related shortcomings.
4	Fariour & Sadri (2009)	A review of the urban planning process in Tehran	A multitude of consultants, changing guidelines, and inconsistencies at various levels prolonged the process and increased the ambiguities.
5	Shokoohi Bidehendi (2019)	Explaining various fallacies in the process of responding to public opinion in urban development programs	The consultant selection process featured ambiguities, raising suspicions of monopolization. A unified and clear methodology is needed from the outset, along with precise studies based on solid data.
6	Pourahmad et al. (2006)	Pathology of urban development plans in Iran	Urban development plans require a systemic approach that pays attention to supra-systemic and sub-systemic dimensions.
7	Imani Jajarmi (2016)	A critical review of urban development policies and programs in Iran	In the absence of public participation and monitoring, policies are entangled in bureaucracy and rent-seeking, and the interests of powerful groups guide the urban growth.
8	APUR (2005)	Evaluation of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan	The approach of preparing the comprehensive and detailed plans simultaneously was introduced as an innovation, but it faced methodological criticisms.
9	Rahmani & Azizi (2021)	A study of the transformations in the understanding of Tehran in its urban development plans	Tehran's urban development plans over time have been prepared based on different understandings of the city, indicating a transformation in urban planning knowledge and the decision-making structure.
10	Davari & Amini (2023)	Spatial analysis of population and activity in Tehran compared with the proposed zones of the comprehensive plan	Tehran has an exceptional spatial structure, with a clustered population pattern and a non-clustered activity pattern.
11	Azizi et al. (2018)	A study of growth control and the legal boundary of the city	The legal boundary of the second Tehran Comprehensive Plan has failed to effectively regulate urban development.
12	Zehraei Pour & Jafarpoor (2021)	The position of Tehran's river valleys in the master document of the comprehensive plan	The study examines the position of river valleys as the city's natural edges in the comprehensive plan.
13	Rahmani et al. (2020)	Comparative evaluation of the principles of the Comprehensive Plan's development model with the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) model	Conformity with new development models, such as TOD, can indicate the plan's efficiency in facing challenges like traffic.
14	Azad Hassan Barough (2022)	Meta-analysis and meta-synthesis of studies related to the strategic-structural (comprehensive) plan of Tehran	Using meta-analysis and meta-synthesis methods, the study summarizes and systematically analyzes previous research on the Tehran Comprehensive Plan.

No.	Author(s) & year	Main research topic	Key findings and results
15	Habibi & Sheikh Ahmadi (2023)	Evaluation of urban development plans and explaining the factors of their inefficiency in terms of content and procedure in Iran	Non-compliance of plans and realities, lack of public participation, and insufficient attention to social justice are among the criticisms of comprehensive plans in Iran.
16	Mohammadi (2017)	Pathology of comprehensive urban plans in Iran	The lack of suitable data and information is a weak point of comprehensive urban plans in Iran.
17	Goya Publishing (2017)	A journey through the models of the urban planning system, with an emphasis on Tehran's urban development plans	The work critically analyzes and provides a pathology of the comprehensive and detailed plans of Tehran. The author, based on supervisory and executive experiences, explains the reasons for the infeasibility of several provisions and highlights the link between theoretical frameworks and the reality of implementation, a crucial step that facilitates the re-examination of planning models and quality improvement in academia, the profession, and urban management.
18	Tajok et al. (2024)	A study of the increase in population capacity due to the non-compliance of the detailed plan with the comprehensive plan, a case study of District 4 of Tehran	The study highlights that managerial structures, legal frameworks, and consultant terms of reference in the cycle from preparation to supervision play a significant and measurable role in creating non-compliance, weighing each actor's share through an expert survey.
19	Tajok et al. (2023)	The impact of managerial structures on the non-compliance of urban plans, a case of comprehensive and detailed plans of Tehran	Approximately 19.7% of the area of the comprehensive plan's zones has been altered in the detailed plans. In District 4, approximately 2,052 hectares (33%) have been transformed, leading to an increase of around 470,000 people in residential capacity, a decrease in service ratio per capita, and an exacerbation of traffic and environmental consequences.

This article, focusing on “direct pathology” rather than a mere literature review, utilizes the same body of studies to diagnose and systematically explain the challenges and shortcomings of the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, elevating the analysis from the level of collection to interpretation. While the report from the research center primarily focuses on identifying, reviewing, and categorizing works and suggesting future research, this article produces an analytical and practical output that directly contributes to understanding and solving the plan's problems.

- For the first time, this article provides a quantitative analysis of 123 scholarly documents, estimating the frequency of themes and showing that about 60% of the discussions are dedicated to weaknesses, only 7% to strengths, and 32% to proposed solutions, offering a precise statistical picture of the research focus.
- Another key innovation is the “temporal analysis” across four phases, from preparation to implementation, which reveals a shift in the focus of critique from “process” in the initial stages to “content” in the implementation stage, aiding a dynamic interpretation of the evolution of perspectives.
- In its qualitative aspect, the “deep meta-synthesis”

with three-stage coding both organizes the pathologies at the procedural, content-related, and managerial levels and consolidates the solutions into five main axes, presenting a coherent conceptual model that was absent in the previous report.

- Four key weaknesses are identified as the root causes of the plan's inefficiency: content-physical weakness, weakness in the planning process, managerial-institutional weakness, and weakness in the performance of consultants and individuals, which clarifies the causal structure of the problems.
 - Solutions are systematically categorized under the axes of reforming the governance structure, reforming the planning process, strengthening plan implementation, ensuring sustainability and justice, and optimizing participation, to specify a clear policy and implementation reform path.
 - The use of “word clouds” and frequency charts provides a clear visual representation of the focus of criticisms and proposals, facilitating the understanding of and engagement with the findings.
- In summary, this article, by adding a temporal dimension and combining quantitative and qualitative methods, transforms existing knowledge within other documents into a new analytical product that, both in problem diagnosis and solution prescription, offers a

deeper and more practical picture of the challenges of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007). The result is a clear formulation of the focal points of weakness and reform priorities that can serve as a basis for a conforming, transparent, and participatory review of future plans.

4. Research Methodology

This research employs a Mixed-Methods Systematic Review approach to assess the process and content of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007). This approach combines two distinct analysis methods:

1. Qualitative Meta-synthesis: To integrate and deeply interpret the findings from previous qualitative and descriptive studies to extract fundamental themes and categories.
2. Quantitative Content Analysis: To count the frequency of identified themes (strengths, weaknesses, and proposals) to determine the amount of attention and focus in the research literature on each dimension of the topic.

4.1. Step One: Systematic Search

To identify a comprehensive set of relevant sources, a systematic search was conducted in national and

international databases. The search strategy included the following:

- Databases: Magiran, Scientific Information Database (SID), Civilica, Ganj, Google Scholar, Humanities Portal, Tehran Municipality's Studies and Planning Center, and Tehran Municipality's Transparency Portal.
- Search Keywords: A combination of Persian and English keywords, such as Tehran Comprehensive Plan, pathology of the comprehensive plan, critique of the 2007 comprehensive plan, Tehran strategic-structural plan, pathology, Tehran Comprehensive Plan, critique, Strategic-Structural Plan.
- Time Frame: Documents published between 2001 and 2023.

4.2. Step Two: Selection and Qualitative Assessment of Studies

To ensure transparency in the process of reviewing and selecting sources, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework was employed. This method provides a standard guide for systematic reviews and meta-analyses, helping researchers systematically document the search, screening, and selection of sources.

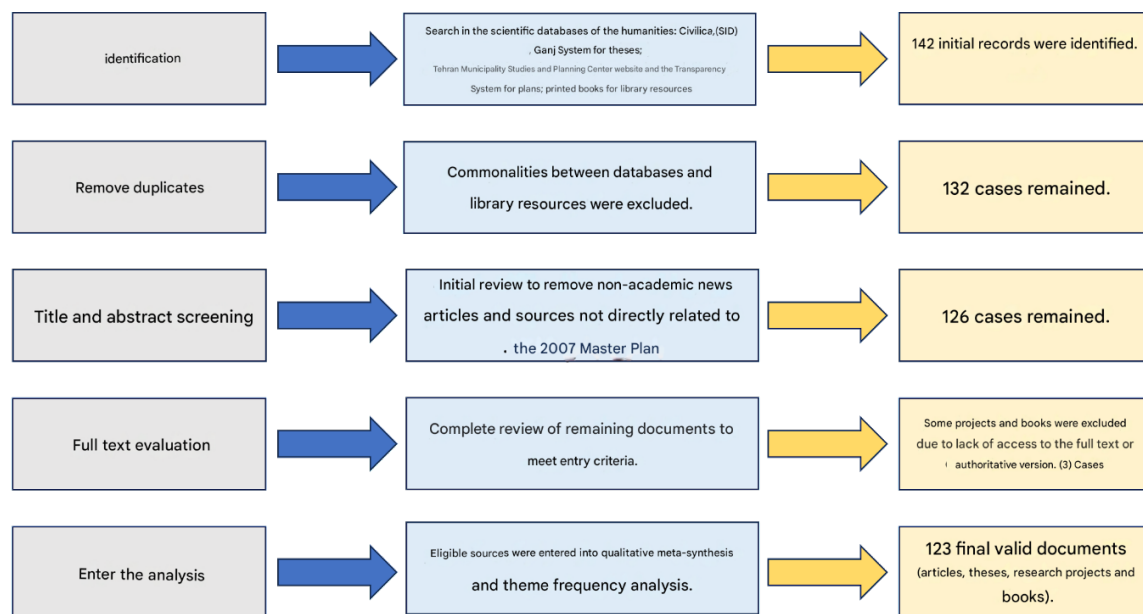


Figure 1. The prisma flowchart

Quality Assessment of Sources

This table assesses the quality of research sources regarding four main categories, highlighting the role each plays in the robustness of the findings. Peer-

reviewed scientific articles and international evaluation reports, such as APUR, have the highest credibility due to peer review and systematic methodology, forming the main pillar of the analysis. University and

institutional books also provide an important theoretical foundation with their deep analytical perspectives; however, the lack of specialized journal-level peer review slightly increases the risk of alignment with the findings of articles. Plans and policy reports have high practical value due to their direct connection to institutional data and policymaking; however, potential client bias and the absence of independent review make their quality variable.

Finally, these sources are valuable due to their use of detailed data and thorough methodology, but limitations in publication and the lack of extensive peer review lead to their credibility being assessed as moderate to good. The combination of these four categories provides a multidimensional framework for a cohesive analysis of the pathology of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan.

Table 2. Quality assessment of sources (source: authors)

Category	Representative examples	Common strengths	Risk/Limitation	Overall evaluation
Articles	Journals like "Manzar," "Haft Shahr," "Name-ye Memari va Shahrsazi," APUR evaluation	Peer-reviewed, systematic methodology, strong citations	Some are conference/ media-based without full peer review	High
Books	Publications from the Center for Studies, Nazar Research Institute, and universities	Reputable publisher, deep analytical perspective	Limited journal-level peer review; requires cross-referencing with articles	High to Medium
Plans/Reports	Danesh-e Shahr, reports from the Center for Studies, steering institutions	Institutional data and policy linkage	Lack of peer review, potential for client bias	Variable (depending on transparency)
Theses	University of Tehran, Art University, Azad University, Tarbiat Modares	Detailed data/methodology, university assessment	Limited publication, lack of peer review	Medium to Good

4.3. Step Three: Data Extraction and Coding

Data related to the strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and solutions of the plan were extracted from the selected documents. The coding process was inspired by Grounded Theory and was carried out in three stages:

1. Open Coding: Identifying initial concepts and codes from the text
2. Axial Coding: Categorizing similar codes and creating main categories
3. Selective Coding: Identifying the core category and relating other categories to it to create an integrated analytical framework

Reliability and Validity of Coding: To ensure the reliability of the coding process, two researchers independently coded a random sample of 20 documents (about 16% of the total). The inter-coder agreement was calculated using Cohen's Kappa, which yielded a value of $\kappa = 0.85$. This value indicates Very Good Agreement. Disagreements were settled through discussion sessions to finalize the coding framework before applying it to the remaining documents.

4.4. Step Four: Data Analysis

The coded data were analyzed using two methods:

1. Qualitative Analysis (Meta-synthesis): In this part, using the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA, the extracted categories and themes were combined and analyzed to achieve a deep, interpretive understanding. The goal was to propose a comprehensive theory or conceptual model of the plan's pathologies by integrating the scattered findings.
2. Quantitative Analysis (Frequency Analysis): After the codes were finalized, the frequency of each code across the entire set of documents was counted. This helped identify the most frequently recurring strengths, weaknesses, and proposals and showed which aspects of the plan the research community has focused on most. The results of this section are presented as frequency charts and word clouds.

4.5. Step Five: Synthesis and Presentation of Findings

In the final step, the results from the qualitative and quantitative analyses were integrated to present a comprehensive, multi-dimensional, and well-

documented picture of the pathology of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007). This combined approach allowed for not only a deep qualitative understanding but also a quantitative overview of the volume of attention given to each topic.

5. Findings

5.1. Thematic Frequency Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, and Proposed Solutions for the Tehran Comprehensive Plan

Thematic frequency analysis compiles data from various studies and analyzes them as a single dataset. By aggregating and analyzing a large amount of data, the reliability of the results is significantly enhanced.

Thus, the findings of “thematic frequency analysis” can be considered more fundamental than those of individual research studies. It can be defined as the analysis of analyses or research on a collection of studies.

In reviewing these studies, a total of 771 codes were identified. As the chart below shows, the most discussed topics related to the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (about 60%) involve describing the plan’s weaknesses. Conversely, only about seven percent of the scholarly sources related to the comprehensive plan pertain to its strengths. Approximately 32% of the codes relate to proposals for amending or revising the plan.

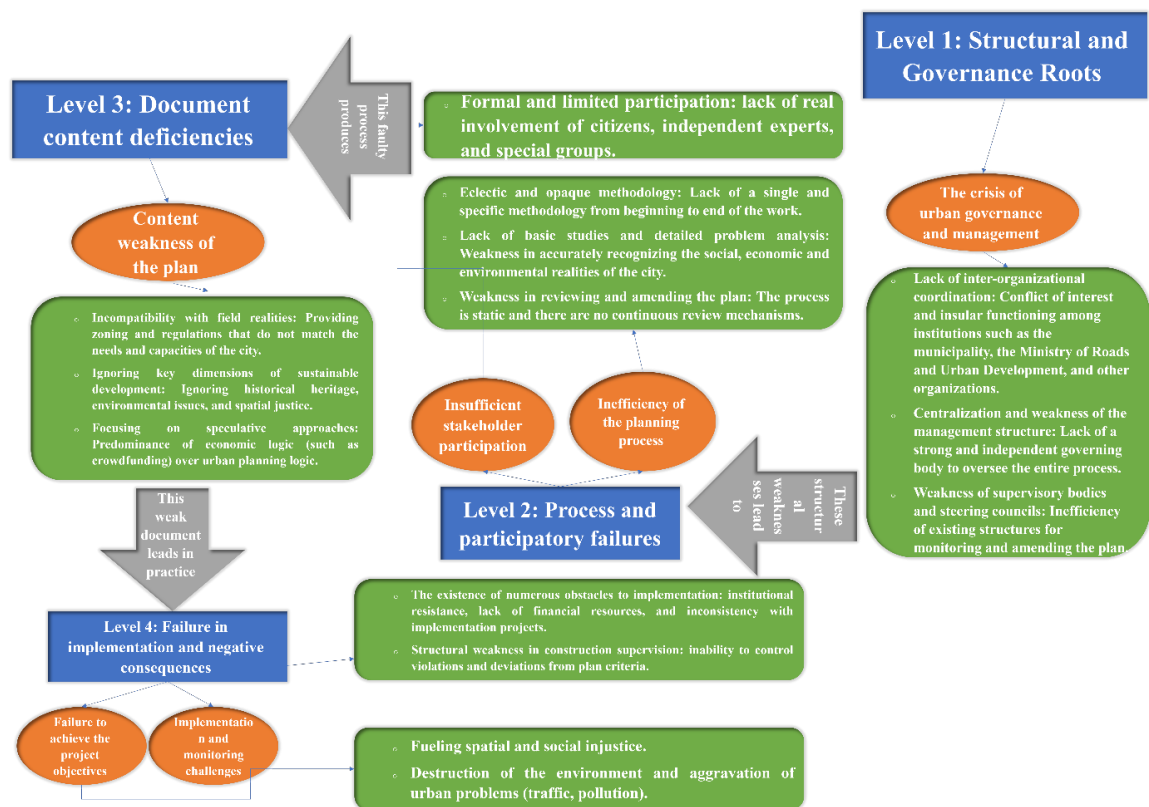


Figure 2. Conceptual framework

The word clouds displayed in this research are generated by MAXQDA software, based on a three-stage coding process (open, axial, and selective). In this type of chart, the frequency of each code in the source materials determines the size and prominence of the word; the more often a code appears in the texts, the larger and more prominent its corresponding word will be in the word cloud. This method provides a visual representation of the qualitative focus of the research discourse, intuitively highlighting which

themes in the critique or evaluation of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan have received the most attention. Regarding the weaknesses emphasized by researchers and scholars, content-related issues of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan hold a significant share. The charts and table below quantitatively illustrate the emphasis researchers place on the plan’s weaknesses.

A) Thematic Frequency Analysis of Weaknesses

Based on the analysis of selective coding, which focuses on identifying the core problems, four main

weaknesses have been identified as the root causes of the inefficiencies in the Tehran Comprehensive Plan. These key and frequently repeated weaknesses include content-physical weakness in the physical and spatial dimensions, weakness in the planning process due to low quality of analyses, managerial-institutional weakness stemming from a lack of coordination among organizations, and weakness in the performance of consultants and individuals, especially regarding the lack of participation. These four areas form the core challenges, while other problems, such as implementation, legal, and social shortcomings, are of secondary importance. Furthermore, using axial coding, these weaknesses are

analyzed in greater depth, revealing their specific dimensions. This analysis shows that at the core of managerial weaknesses is a “lack of inter-organizational coordination,” and the planning weaknesses suffer from “inadequate coherence” and an “eclectic methodology.” In the physical domain, “uncontrolled urban sprawl” and “revenue-driven approaches” like selling excess building density are identified as the main problems. Additionally, “lack of public participation” stands out as the most significant shortcoming in the performance of consultants. Other layers of the problems include weaknesses in plan revision, disregard for regulations, and neglect of social, cultural, and environmental dimensions.

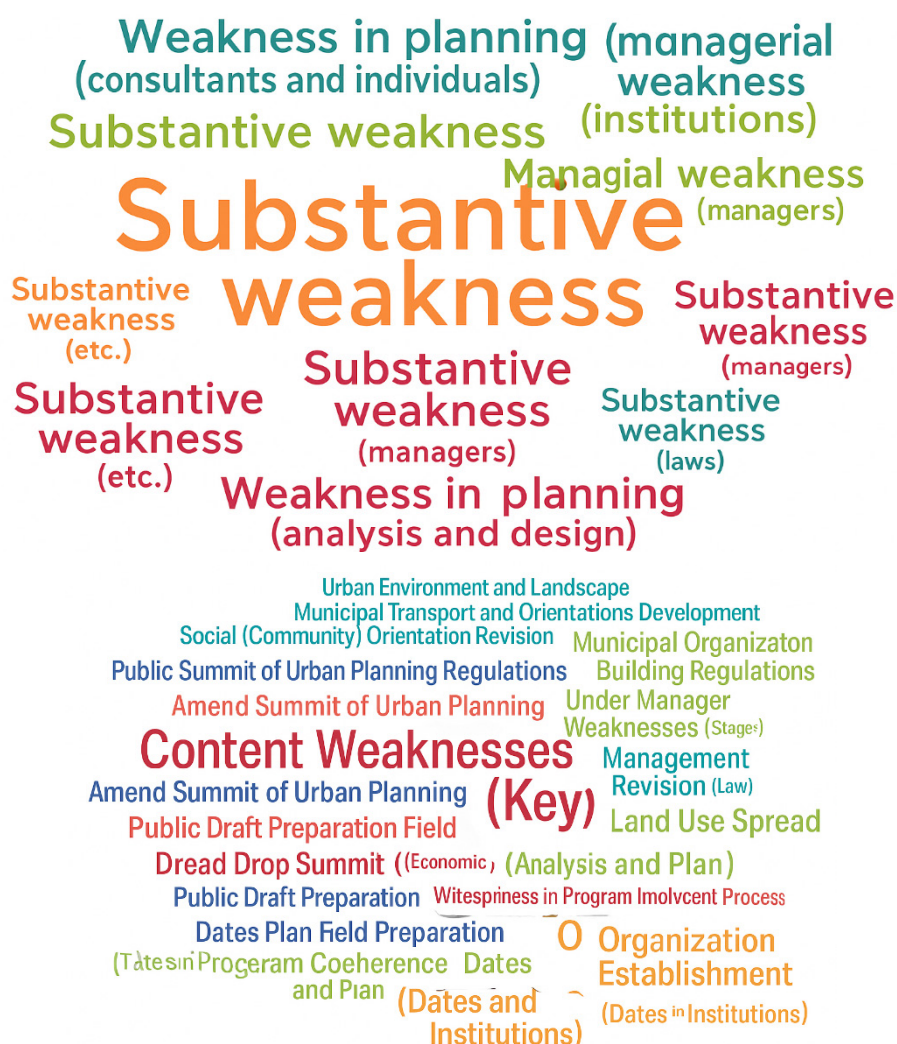


Figure 3. Word cloud of weaknesses explored from selective coding

B) Thematic Frequency Analysis of Strengths

Based on the analysis of selective coding, two prominent and frequently repeated strengths have

been identified in the comprehensive plan: strategic planning and comprehensive planning. These indicate that a macro-level, forward-looking, and holistic

C) Thematic Frequency Analysis of Proposals

Based on the analysis of selective coding, which identifies reform priorities, “reforming the planning process and approaches” is at the forefront of all proposals with the highest frequency. Immediately following, the areas of “land and housing,” “urban management,” “participation,” “spatial justice,” and “urban renewal” are identified as the most essential axes for reform with very high frequency. These items constitute the core of the transformational needs within the urban planning system. Following these, proposals related to environmental considerations, urban economy, reforming the terms of reference, and cultural-social planning are included. Lastly, items with lower frequency, such as transportation development, water resource management, and passive defense, complete the list.

In the analysis based on axial coding, the details of these proposals become clearer. “Reforming the planning process” emphasizes the necessity of being problem-oriented, transparent, participatory, and continuously revised. In the “land and housing” domain, improving governance and providing affordable housing are primary focuses. Proposals for “urban management” aim at participatory models and enhanced coordination, while “participation” emphasizes inter-sectoral coordination and involvement of all stakeholders. Furthermore, “urban renewal” emphasizes regeneration and inclusive development, and “spatial justice” underscores equitable distribution of facilities. Other significant proposals include strengthening the steering body for plan feasibility, sustaining the municipality’s financial

resources, revising density regulations, and prioritizing environmental considerations. Notably, there is a clear lack of attention to critical issues, such as water resource management and passive defense.

5.2. Meta-synthesis of Strengths, Weaknesses, and Proposed Solutions for the Plan

To conduct this analysis, the meta-synthesis method was used. For this purpose, relevant documents were collected. Following an initial review and elimination of irrelevant sources, texts were examined, and coding was performed at three levels: open, axial, and categorical. In open coding, paragraphs were scrutinized, and any sentence that identified a result or piece of information about the critique of the process and content of Tehran’s Comprehensive Plan was labeled. These open codes were then grouped according to semantic similarity into categories, which were compared and combined through axial coding to identify main categories and their dimensions.

The frequency charts illustrated in this article are generated through data processing in Excel, based on counting the number of codes extracted during the meta-synthesis. The size of each section in these charts correlates directly with code frequency, with more frequently repeated codes appearing visually larger. These charts reinforce the quantitative aspect of the analysis and objectively show in which areas (e.g., content-related, procedural, or managerial weaknesses) the research community has had a greater focus.

Table 3. Features of meta-synthesis for analyzing existing critical texts

Domain	Description
What	What are the main pathologies of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan?
Unit of Analysis	Articles, research projects, books, theses, and dissertations
When	The 2000s, 2010s, and the early 2020s (2001-2023)
How	Using secondary analysis, through a staged and linear process, and using models (e.g., Sandelowski and Barroso model)

By employing the meta-synthesis method and analyzing the content of existing critical texts, the dimensions and categories related to the shortcomings of the process and content of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan have been identified.

A) Meta-synthesis of Weaknesses

A comprehensive analysis and meta-synthesis of studies conducted on the Tehran Comprehensive Plan

(2007) reveal a classification of weaknesses into five key areas: Governance and urban management crisis, inefficient planning process, insufficient stakeholder participation, content and capacity-building weaknesses, and implementation and monitoring challenges. In the governance and urban management crisis, the lack of coordination among responsible organizations and the weakness of the executive-

managerial structure are identified as the most prominent obstacles to achieving the plan's objectives. These shortcomings have created a fertile ground for centralism and inflexibility in decision-making and have also weakened the effectiveness of supervisory bodies and steering councils. In the inefficient planning process, the weaknesses in revising and amending the plan, along with a lack of foundational studies and precise problem identification, indicate a static and inflexible approach to urban dynamics. This has led to the formulation of a plan that lacks sufficient correspondence with field developments and realities. In relation to insufficient stakeholder participation, the lack of effective involvement of the public, experts, and special groups in the planning and decision-

making process is cited as one of the most significant flaws, which has led to the neglect of social dimensions and the diverse needs of the city. The weakness in content and capacity-building also manifests as inattention to historical heritage and environmental issues, as well as a focus on speculative approaches, such as selling density, which in turn has fueled spatial and social injustices. Finally, in the area of implementation and monitoring challenges, the existence of numerous obstacles in executing the plan and a structural weakness in monitoring construction, along with the plan's lack of correspondence with implementation and financial realities, are among the key reasons for not fully achieving the plan's objectives.

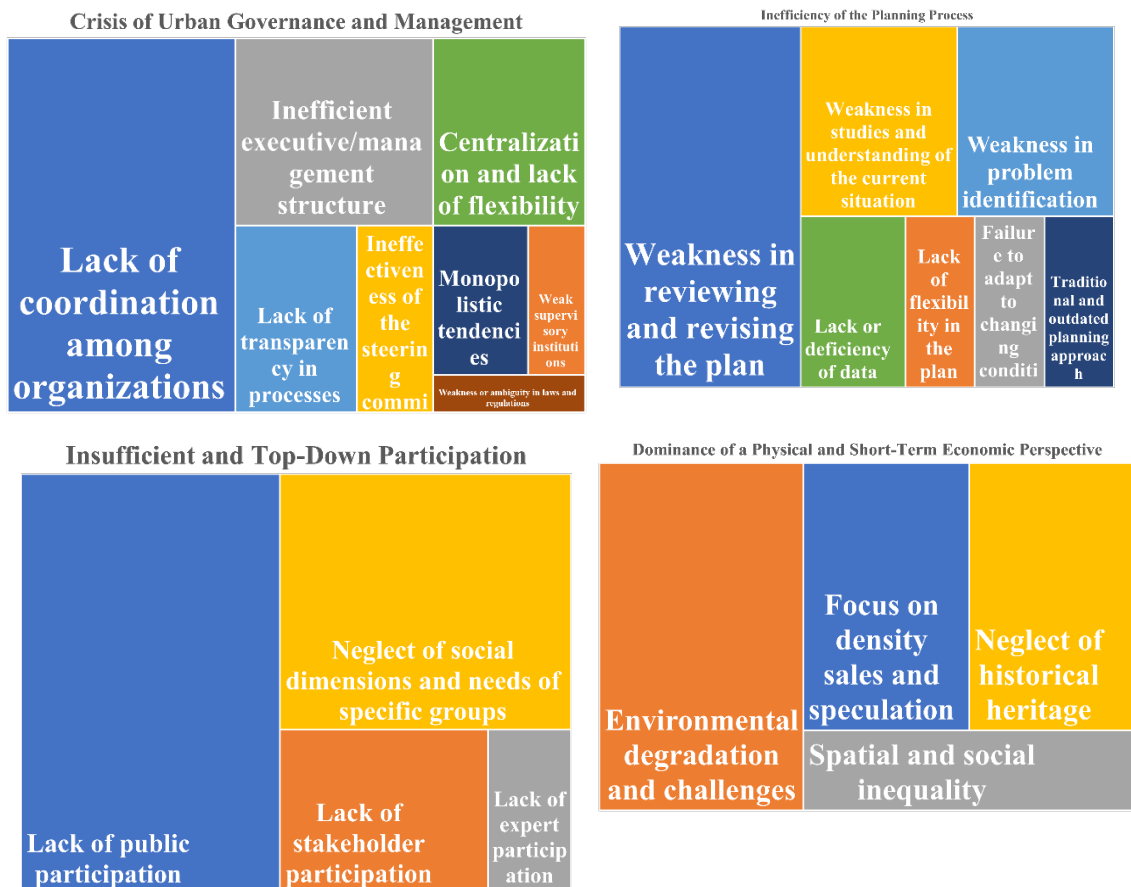




Figure 5. Meta-synthesis of weaknesses (in detail)

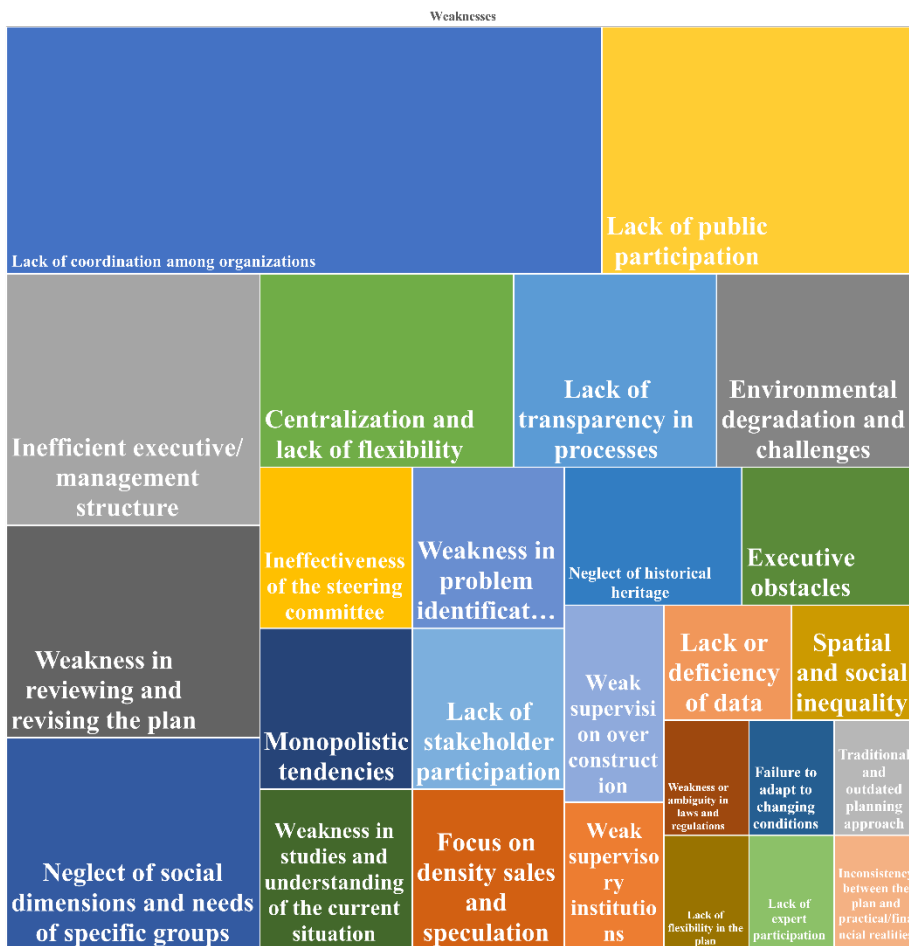


Figure 5. Meta-synthesis of weaknesses

B) Meta-synthesis of Strengths

Analyzing the strengths of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007) reveals a positive performance of this plan in several key areas. Special attention to the historical fabric of Tehran is mentioned as a key strength of the plan. The effort to preserve, revive, and organize this

valuable fabric is considered a significant step towards protecting the identity and authenticity of Tehran. The macro-level planning framework, as the essence of the plan, is another strength. This framework provides a basis for coordinating and integrating development actions at the city level, preventing fragmentation and

interference in decision-making. The topical and locational programs have significantly improved the plan's effectiveness by providing more detailed solutions for the specific issues of different areas of the city. Preventing urban sprawl is another achievement of the comprehensive plan, which has helped to preserve agricultural lands and green spaces

around the city, preventing the negative consequences of uncontrolled development. The definition of the capital's fringe, by determining the legal boundary of Tehran and its suburbs, has contributed to better management of development in this sensitive area, reducing legal overlaps and ambiguities.



Figure 6. Meta-synthesis of strengths

C) Meta-synthesis of Proposals

Based on meta-synthesis analyses, the proposed solutions to overcome the weaknesses of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007) are categorized into five main axes, each directly addressing one of the affected areas. To reform the governance and management structure, strengthening the steering body and inter-sectoral coordination are presented as fundamental priorities. This requires clarifying regulations, reforming the power structure, and institutional capacity-building to increase transparency and accountability. In reforming the planning process and approaches, a paradigm shift from static planning to strategic planning and continuous revision is deemed necessary. This approach, along with strengthening methodology and utilizing geographic information

systems (GIS) and international experiences, seeks to create a dynamic, data-driven, and flexible process. Ensuring a trend towards sustainability and justice is also one of the fundamental proposed axes, which emphasizes prioritizing the environment, resilience, and pollution reduction. It also includes protecting heritage and urban identity, ensuring spatial and social justice, and balanced development. This approach takes comprehensive plans beyond a purely physical-economic perspective and places social and environmental dimensions at the core of development. In the dimension of strengthening plan implementation, continuous evaluation of the plan's impacts and effective monitoring and control over construction are proposed. Also, attention to implementation prerequisites in the initial stages of formulation is vital

to ensure realism and feasibility. Finally, in the area of optimizing participation, the emphasis is on the real participation of stakeholders, including the public, the private sector, and experts, in all stages of planning

and implementation. This active participation not only helps enrich the plan's content but also provides the basis for public acceptance and collective responsibility for the plan's implementation.

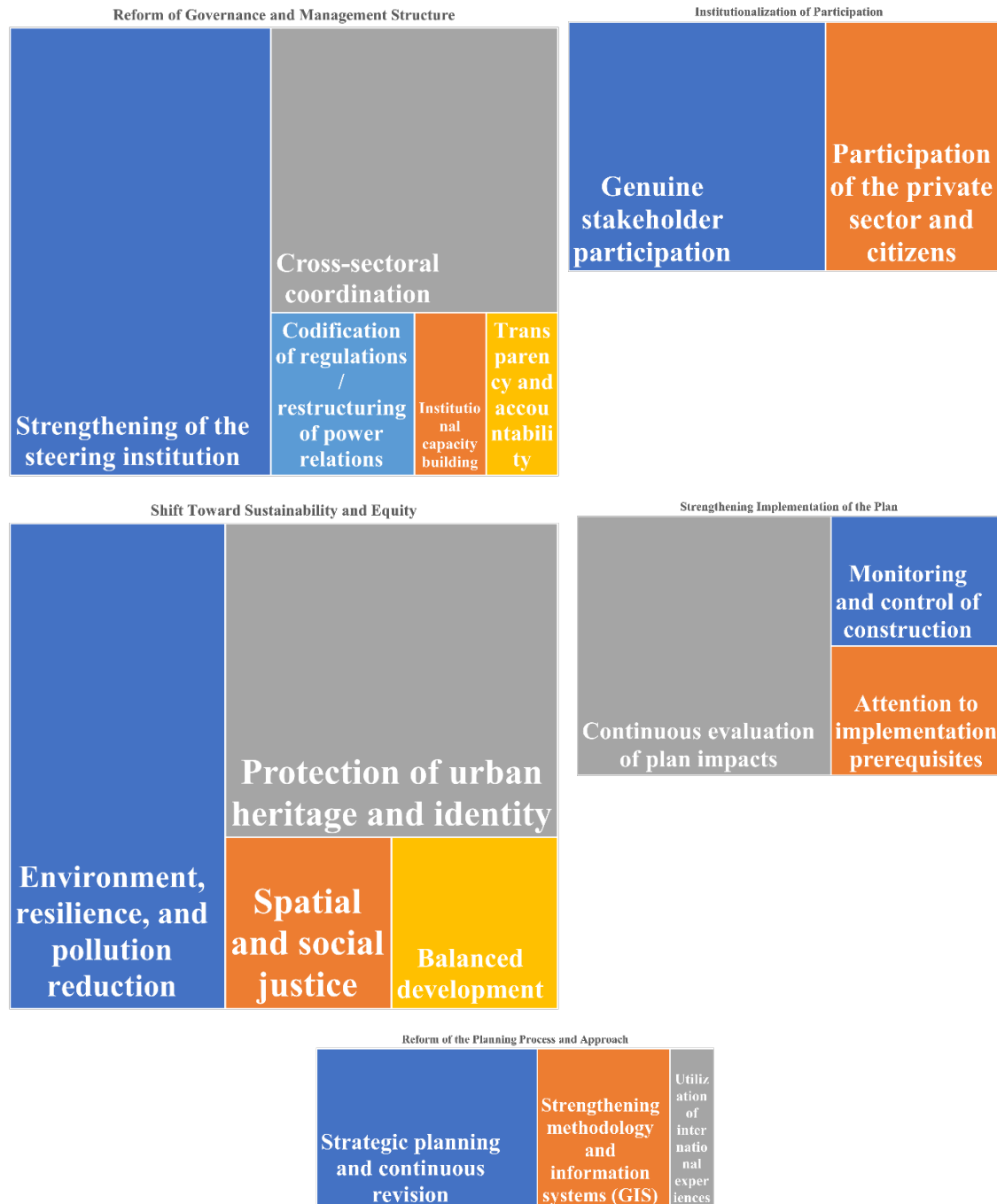


Figure 7. Meta-synthesis of proposals (in detail)



Figure 8. Meta-synthesis of proposals

5.3. Temporal Analysis of Research Perspectives on the Tehran Comprehensive Plan

Based on a temporal analysis of studies conducted on the Tehran Comprehensive Plan, perspectives on its strengths, weaknesses, and proposed improvements evolve over four distinct time phases (from preparation to implementation). This analysis shows that researchers' understanding of the plan has changed as it moved from theoretical stages to practical stages. The temporal analysis charts in the article are organized based on the different periods of the formation and implementation of the Tehran

Comprehensive Plan, illustrating the change in researchers' approaches over time. In these charts, the views and criticisms of researchers are categorized and displayed in four main phases (preparation and approval, preparation of detailed plans, implementation phase, and the recent review periods). This approach allows the research to track the conceptual and content-related evolution of critiques and proposals over time; it shows how the focus of attention has shifted from critiquing the process to content-related weaknesses and then to participatory and economic proposals.



Figure 9. Temporal analysis of different dimensions of studies related to the comprehensive plan (2005–2023)

Analysis of Strengths: The Persistence of Content Strength against a Stable Managerial Weakness

In all periods under review, content strength has been recognized as the most prominent positive feature of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan. In the first phase (preparation and approval, 2005-2009), the focus on theoretical aspects led to content strength having a 76% share, while managerial strength was only 4%. In the second phase (preparation of detailed plans, 2008-2012), with the emergence of challenges related to translating general concepts into details, the share of content strength decreased to 60%, and in contrast,

attention to implementation structures increased the share of managerial strength to 20%. However, in the third phase (plan implementation, 2013-2018), the structural weakness became clearly visible; despite content strength being at its peak with 77%, managerial strength plummeted to 2%, indicating that weakness in management and institutional coordination was the main obstacle to achieving the plan's goals. This pattern was repeated in the fourth phase (Zakani's mayoral term, 2021-2023) with a 75% share for content strength and only 4% for managerial strength, emphasizing the persistence of managerial challenges.

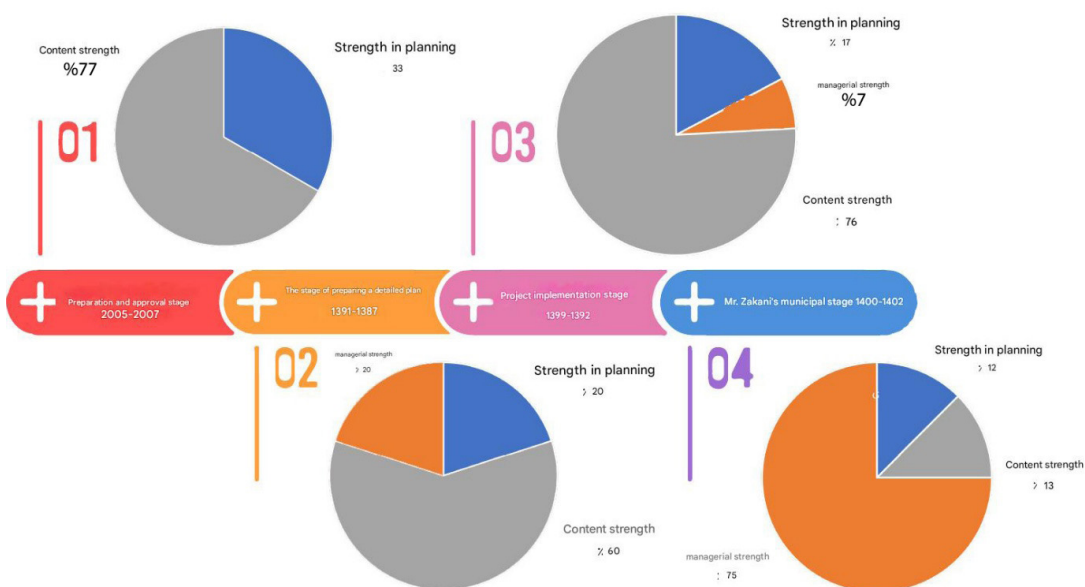


Figure 10. Temporal analysis of surveyed strength dimensions from studies related to the comprehensive plan (2005–2023)

Analysis of Weaknesses: Shift in the Focus of Critique from Process to Content

The main focus of criticism of the comprehensive plan has shifted over time. In the first phase (preparation and approval), the most criticism was directed at the planning process, and weakness in planning (analysis and design) was identified as the main weakness with 53%. In the second phase (preparation of detailed plans), weakness in planning (43%) and managerial weakness (22%) were still cited as the main challenges, indicating problems in detailing the plan and necessary

coordination. A fundamental transformation occurred in the third phase (implementation); in this stage, with the operationalization of the plan, content-related weaknesses jumped to 69%, indicating that the theoretical and procedural shortcomings of the previous stages manifested themselves as concrete flaws in the physical and social dimensions during the implementation phase. This trend continued in the fourth phase, and content-related weaknesses, particularly in the physical and economic domains, remained the main challenge at 64%.

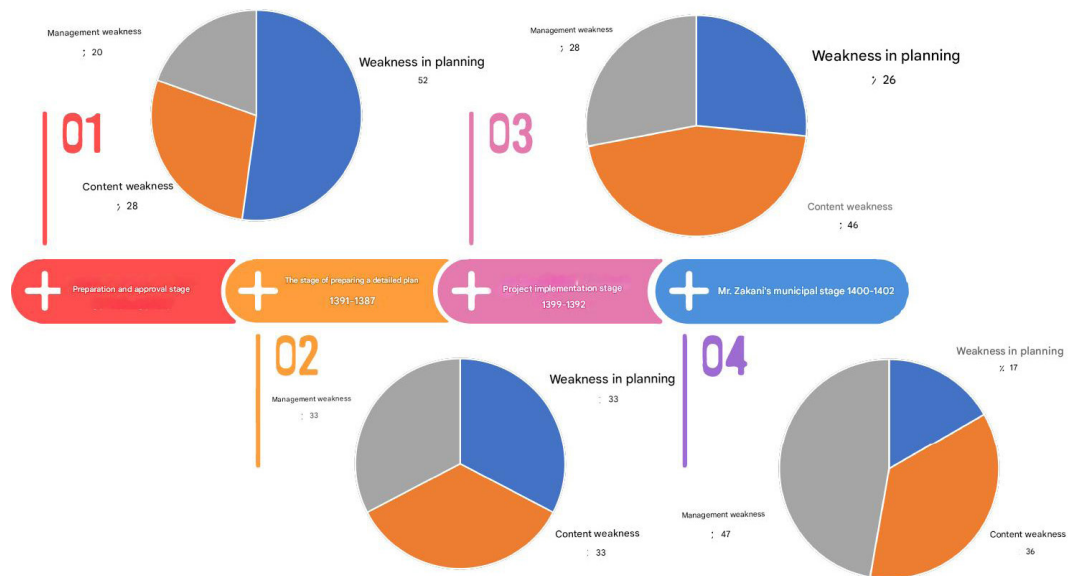


Figure 11. Temporal analysis of surveyed weakness dimensions from studies related to the comprehensive plan (2005–2023)

Analysis of Proposals: The Evolution of Solutions from Structure to Participation and Economy

The proposals offered for improving the plan have also evolved in line with the challenges of each period. In the first phase, proposals were mainly focused on creating fundamental structures like establishing a managerial body and land-use zoning. In the second phase, with the move towards implementation details, topics like urban renewal and control of the city limits and fringe gained importance. In the third phase (implementation), with the revealing of social and economic challenges, the majority of proposals were

dedicated to stakeholder participation and solving land and housing problems. Finally, in the fourth phase, with a focus on fiscal sustainability and improving methods, the proposals were mainly on urban economics and municipal finance, and reforming planning processes and approaches. However, a key point in all phases is that proposals for improving managerial aspects have always had a very low share, which indicates a persistent and deep challenge in enhancing the implementation and managerial capacity of the comprehensive plan.

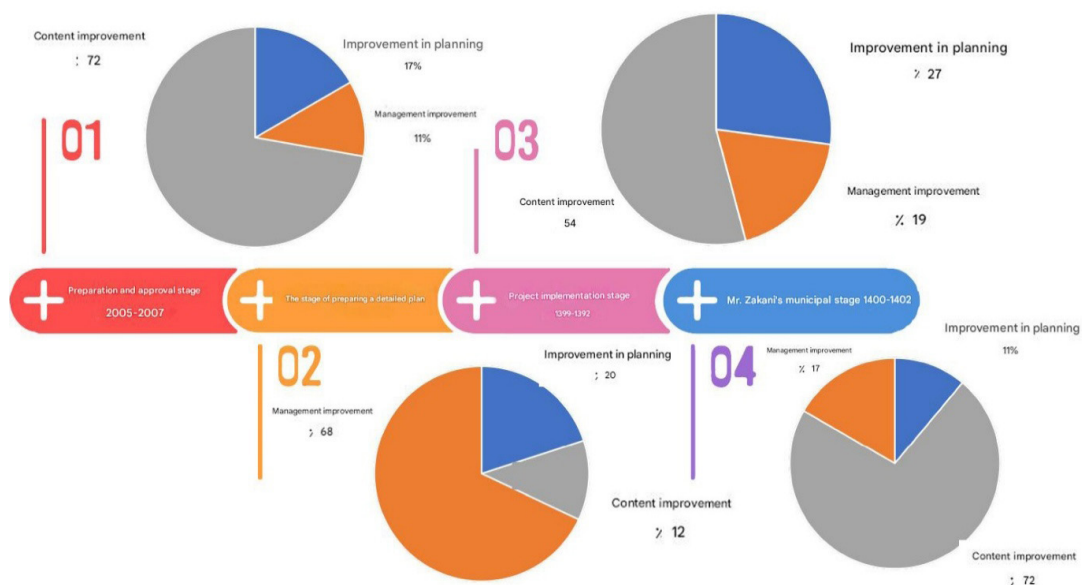


Figure 12. Temporal analysis of surveyed proposal dimensions from studies related to the comprehensive plan (2005–2023)

6. Discussion and Conclusion

In response to the identified issues, previous research has proposed a wide range of solutions. In the areas of content and approach reforms, emphasis is placed on revising zoning with attention to environmental capacities (Davari, 2023; Jalili, 2015), preserving cultural heritage and urban identity (Zehraei Pour, 202; Bigdeli, 2016), integrated planning for housing low-income groups (Taghizadeh, 2017), attention to spatial justice (Jalili, 2016), developing a clear economic strategy (Shieh, 2010), and prioritizing the renewal of deteriorated areas from a social and empowering perspective (Shokoohi, 2020). Meanwhile, in procedural and methodological reforms, the need for establishing a unified and transparent methodology (Shokoohi, 2019), creating a comprehensive, up-to-date GIS-based database (Rahmani, 2021), and eliminating monopolistic practices in consultant selection (Shokoohi, 2019) has been emphasized.

To ensure plan feasibility, strengthening implementation and monitoring mechanisms is crucial. This involves revising and reinforcing institutional arrangements for ongoing, inter-sectoral monitoring (Jalili, 2014; Andalib, 2009), enhancing citizen and stakeholder participation, ensuring precise legal and regulatory frameworks (Dezfouli, 2021), improving transparency and accountability (Dariush, 2016), establishing quantitative and qualitative indicators for continuous evaluation (Herandi, 2020; Qalambar, 2021), and securing sustainable revenue sources beyond reliance on selling building density (Municipal

Revenue Outlook, 2010). Ultimately, a shift in the macro perspective from product-focused to process-focused planning is essential—viewing plans as dynamic documents that require ongoing revision—along with empowering residents (Shokoohi Bidehendi, 2020), decentralization (Rezaei Parto, 2018), and increasing the city's resilience.

In summary, despite its initial intent for transformation, the Tehran Comprehensive Plan (2007) could not escape the pathologies of past plans and faced serious challenges in its process, content, and implementation. Weakness in sustainable institutionalization, insufficient participation, informational and methodological shortcomings, and neglect of critical social, economic, and environmental dimensions of the city are among these core issues. The solutions proposed by researchers offer a roadmap for improving this document in future reviews, emphasizing strengthened integrated and participatory governance, improved data quality, holistic attention to sustainable development, and the establishment of ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Moving toward an adaptive, transparent, accountable, and genuinely participatory planning system is a crucial step for Tehran's future, so that the historical opportunities to guide the development of this metropolis are not lost further.

Sensitivity analysis over time showed that the greatest vulnerability occurs during the transition to implementation, with managerial components proving more susceptible to temporal changes than the plan's

content. Between 2005-2009, the theoretical focus led to a peak in content strength (76%) alongside a minimum of managerial strength (4%), with critiques mainly emphasizing weaknesses in the planning process (53%) and structural proposals. From 2008 to 2012, with the move towards detailing, content strength decreased to 60%, while managerial strength rose to 20%, though weaknesses in planning (43%) and management (22%) persisted, indicating moderate sensitivity in the phase of translating concepts into an executive agenda. A turning point occurred from 2013-2018: concurrently with the plan's implementation,

content strength rose to 77%, but managerial strength fell sharply to 2%, with content weaknesses rising to 69%, revealing maximum sensitivity to time at the start of implementation and the significant impact of institutional coordination failures. In 2021-2023, the pattern stabilized: content strength was at 75%, and managerial strength at 4%, while content-related weaknesses (especially physical and economic) remained at a high level of 64%, and proposals focused on financial sustainability, urban economy, and improved methods.

Table 4. Systematic table of identified problems and solutions

Problem	Problem citation	Proposed solution	Solution citation	Responsible institution(s)	Timeframe	Monitoring index
Lack of a clear, theoretical, and coherent framework	"This plan is a combined product of planning systems... the strategic-structural comprehensive plan" (Mahmoudi, 2009)	Propose a unified methodology for the plan from the beginning of the study	"A plan's methodology cannot be left to time, and a specific methodology should be designed for it from the outset." (Shokoohi, 2019)	High Council for Urban Planning and Architecture of Iran; Ministry of Roads and Urban Development; Tehran Municipality (Planning Deputy)	Short-term: 6-12 months for formulating and communicating the methodology directive	Approval of the directive; Application of the unified methodology in all consultant reports
Weakness in public and social participation	"The level of public participation... is lower than announced." (ISNA, 2006)	Participation of the community and stakeholders, and inter-agency cooperation	"Participation of the public, stakeholders, and different groups... ensures the preparation of a suitable plan in line with the real needs of society." (ISNA, 2006)	Tehran Municipality and Tehran City Council (Participation framework); Ministry of Interior (Local governance charter)	Short to mid-term: 6-18 months for designing and institutionalizing participatory cycles	Number of participatory processes held annually; Percentage of projects with stakeholder input; Diversity of participating groups
Neglected issues (Housing and socio-economic matters)	"The Tehran Comprehensive Plan has not seriously addressed the issue of housing." (Madanipour, 2002)	A coherent plan for housing and an economic-development strategy	"The existence of an integrated housing planning system for low-income groups... should be considered." (Taghizadeh, 2017)	Ministry of Roads and Urban Development; Tehran Municipality; Housing Foundation; High Council for Urban Planning (Housing policymaking)	Mid-term: 1-3 years for formulating and implementing an integrated housing policy framework	Approval of the urban housing policy document; Number of affordable units for low-income groups; Reduction in the share of housing cost for low-income deciles
Reliance on inadequate data	"A comprehensive database that is continuously updated does not exist." (Boomsazegan, 2006)	Establishment of a data collection and GIS network	"Development of a GIS system for data analysis and processing and storing information comprehensively is essential." (Rahmani, 2021)	Tehran Municipality (ICT Organization); Statistical Center of Iran; Ministry of Interior (National data coordination)	Mid-term: 1-2 years for establishing the system and network; Early outputs in 6 months	Percentage of vital spatial layers produced and updated; Frequency of updates (monthly, quarterly); Data quality assessment

Problem	Problem citation	Proposed solution	Solution citation	Responsible institution(s)	Timeframe	Monitoring index
Unanswered questions (e.g., about the capital's fringe)	"The fourth annex of the comprehensive plan... raises many questions that the plan..."	Management of the capital's fringe and considering strategic approaches	"Amending the law, providing a comprehensive and updated definition, moving towards strategic management	Ministry of Interior; High Council for Urban Planning and Architecture; Governor's Office	Mid-term: 1-2 years for legal and institutional amendments	Approval of the legal fringe boundary; Establishment of a fringe management body; Reduction in conflicts
Internal inconsistencies	"Despite having an ambitious vision, the outcome of the plan... lacks the power to realize this vision." (Dolatabadi, 2009)	Prediction of performance indicators	"An instrument for measuring the realization of the vision should be implemented in consecutive years to make the plan's feasibility... possible." (Qalambar, 2021)	Tehran Municipality (Planning and Development Deputy); City Council (Requiring reporting); High Council for Urban Planning (Oversight)	Short-term: 6-12 months for developing KPIs. Mid-term: 2-3 years for institutionalizing the monitoring cycle	Number/quality of approved KPIs; Publication of annual reports; Percentage of projects aligned with vision objectives
Contradiction between planning scales	"Simultaneous preparation of the comprehensive and detailed plans... is considered an unconventional approach." (Zekavat, 2009; ISNA, 2006)	Decentralization and strengthening a polycentric model and hierarchical planning system for housing	"Strengthening the polycentric model... and creating a hierarchical system for housing planning." (Rezaei Parto, 2018; Shokoohi Bidehendi, 2014)	High Council for Urban Planning (Coordination of levels); Tehran Municipality (Supervision of transportation-spatial coherence), Metro Company	Mid to long-term: 2-5 years for phasing structural transportation projects	Number of strengthened urban centers; Reduction in travel share to the CBD; Harmonization of detailed plans with master documents

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed equally to this article.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding this article.

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