

Original Article

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Explaining the socio-legal conflicts of privatizing residential Cul-de-Sacs in Shiraz

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Abstract

In recent years, the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs and the installation of street barriers, as tools for traffic control and access management, have become a controversial issue in urban management. This study aims to explain the social and legal conflicts associated with installing barriers to privatize residential cul-de-sacs in urban thoroughfares, and to examine the various dimensions of this issue from the perspectives of stakeholders and experts. Given the multi-dimensional nature of these conflicts and the limited existing theoretical literature, this research employs a mixed-method (quantitative-qualitative) approach. In the qualitative phase, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with urban management experts and analyzed using thematic analysis. The qualitative findings served as the basis for designing the quantitative instrument (questionnaire). In the quantitative phase, the importance and severity of the identified factors were measured among resident and non-resident groups in Shiraz using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test. The findings indicated that residents, driven by a sense of spatial ownership, perceive barriers as enhancing security, local cohesion, and quality of life. In contrast, non-residents view them as a symptom of poor urban planning and a restriction on access to public space. Consequently, this phenomenon holds different meanings and functions for the two social groups, generating opposing interpretations regarding its role in spatial justice. Furthermore, the results suggest that the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs and the installation of barriers is not merely a physical intervention but a socio-spatial phenomenon with divergent consequences. Proper management of this issue requires an awareness of these differences and the formulation of context-sensitive policies.

Keywords

Residential Cul-de-Sacs
Shiraz City
socio-legal conflicts
street barriers

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1. Introduction

From the perspective of urban sociology, urban spaces have long been regarded as complex settings for the formation and reproduction of human interactions and the manifestation of diverse forms of life within urban society. The vital arteries of the urban fabric, such as streets and alleys, function beyond their mere role in providing access. They are social spaces in which relationships, cultural exchanges, and conflicts, both latent and overt, emerge and persist. In the contemporary era, the accelerating pace of urbanization, together with increasing population density and rapid transformations in the physical form and functions of cities, has reshaped the landscape of spatial governance and spatial relations. Because spaces are products of social relations and are themselves transformed through social relations (Sandler, 2020), these changes affect how public spaces are used as social spaces (Orhan, 2022). Historically, the concepts of ownership and access to space in cities have continuously evolved. In Iran, until relatively recently, many alleys and even the courtyards of houses were regarded as semi-public spaces. However, with the expansion of urbanization, increasing population density, the growing complexity of economic and social relations, and the expansion of private ownership, the concepts of privacy and exclusive ownership have gained greater importance. This transformation, particularly in residential cul-de-sacs, where access is more restricted, has led residents of these alleys to develop a stronger sense of ownership over the alley space and to perceive it as part of their property or private sphere.

Such changes in citizens' attitudes and in the ways urban spaces are occupied, managed, or controlled have implications that extend beyond the physical dimension and directly affect the social and legal spheres. On the one hand, citizens legitimately assert their right to use public spaces and the built environment freely; on the other hand, residents tend to perceive themselves as entitled to manage public spaces under their ownership according to their own preferences (Karakoç & Soylemez-Karakoc, 2023). Although urban designers and planners have repeatedly emphasized the relationship between physical design and a sense of community in public open spaces, limited research has addressed the significance of residential streets and the semi-open public spaces associated with them (Swapan et al., 2019). Within neoliberal urban policies, grassroots and spontaneous actions are generally subject to socio-

political constraints (Weesley et al., 2021). At first glance, such actions may be regarded as manifestations of citizen participation and as expressions of the "right to the city." However, these bottom-up practices often generate significant contradictions: while they may provide vital, locally responsive solutions, they can simultaneously reproduce inequalities, instability, and fragmented forms of governance (Providence, 2025). Bottom-up initiatives are broadly aligned with the right-to-the-city movement and make strong claims for the re-appropriation and redistribution of public space (Baumgartner et al., 2025).

In Iran, the weakness of institutional mechanisms for democratic citizen participation and the lack of relevant legislation have further complicated this situation, making democratic decision-making and the participation of citizens, as the most significant stakeholders in urban life, difficult and, to some extent, impossible (Amerian et al., 2026). Consequently, the right to the city, as a collective right, has generally been appropriated in the urban context of Iran in favor of individuals' private rights and interests (Habibi & Amiri, 2015). This conflict shapes the primary context for the present study, namely the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs and the installation of access barriers, which can be regarded as forms of private investment in the city's public space intended to enhance security and prevent excessive vehicle parking, particularly in the city's CBD or affluent neighborhoods. It is argued that constructing cul-de-sacs is highly effective in providing a safe environment for residents (Kim et al., 2017), and that a safer living environment has been a major driving force behind the development of exclusive residential areas (Ntakana et al., 2025). However, the frequent use of other security measures, such as high fences and CCTV cameras, to protect individual residential units in these areas confirms that merely constructing exclusive cul-de-sacs does not guarantee the desired level of security for residents (Johnson & Bowers, 2010).

Conflicts arising from installing access barriers in residential cul-de-sacs are multidimensional. From a legal perspective, the issue is particularly complex. Urban planning legislation, comprehensive and detailed plans, traffic regulations, and even civil law have addressed, to varying degrees, issues related to access to streets and passages and the use of urban space. However, from a legal standpoint, Iran's urban planning, architectural, and building regulations contain no explicit provision on access barriers. Moreover, upstream urban planning and traffic

legislation generally prioritize the public interest, traffic circulation, and the provision of urban services. Consequently, legal gaps and differing interpretations of existing regulations have made these conflicts difficult to resolve and, in some cases, have led to legal proceedings.

From a social perspective, such measures may isolate residents of these alleys from the wider urban community, potentially fostering feelings of alienation, superiority, and even confrontation with other citizens. Furthermore, these barriers may impede access for emergency response services, such as fire and ambulance services, as well as municipal services, including waste collection and postal services, thereby potentially compromising public safety.

A review of previous studies indicates that most research has focused on the proliferation of gated communities and their implications for social exclusion and spatial inequality (Bandaiko et al., 2022; Borsdorf & Hidalgo, 2008; Hodkinson, 2012; Morales, 2024), the role of urban governance in the formation of such communities (Tedong et al., 2015), spatial inequalities resulting from the privatization of residential areas (Low, 2008; McGuirk & Dowling, 2009) and streets (Tedong et al., 2018), the redesign of cul-de-sacs to enhance the quality of public space (Khorshidifard, 2021), and the role of cul-de-sacs in processes of territorialization (Charmes, 2010).

Therefore, these studies have generally focused on only one legal, social, or physical dimension of the phenomenon and have paid less attention to the multidimensional nature of conflicts arising from the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs. Moreover, the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs through the installation of access barriers on public streets, as an informal and micro-scale form of urban enclosure, has received limited scholarly attention. The existing literature has also paid relatively little empirical attention to differences in the perceptions and evaluations of different stakeholder groups, particularly residents and non-residents, regarding the installation of access barriers. Accordingly, the novelty of the present study lies in its mixed-methods approach, its comparison of two stakeholder groups, and its provision of empirical evidence to inform policymaking that is responsive to differences in stakeholders' perceptions in the management of urban streets.

Given the complexities and issues outlined above, this study aims to explain the social and legal conflicts associated with installing access barriers and

privatizing cul-de-sacs in Shiraz. As one of Iran's major metropolitan areas, Shiraz has experienced extensive residential development, an increasing use of access barriers, and restricted access to some cul-de-sacs in recent decades. This phenomenon is observed across numerous neighborhoods and urban streets, including the areas around Ghodousi Boulevard, Zand Boulevard, Niayesh Boulevard, Shahid Aghaei Street, Mabas Street, Moallem Street, and other residential areas of the city. The installation of access barriers in various cul-de-sac alleys along major, heavily trafficked urban corridors – such as Sattarkhan, Ghasr al-Dasht, and Motaahari Streets – has become a prominent feature of the urban landscape. Because these corridors serve as some of the city's main transportation arteries and handle a substantial volume of daily traffic, many Shiraz residents frequently encounter this issue.

As a result, the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs in Shiraz is not merely an issue affecting the residents of these streets; it has become a visible urban issue and a subject of debate among citizens and various stakeholders. This situation has generated a conflict between residents' demands to enhance the security and tranquility of their streets, on the one hand, and the public's right of access to urban streets, on the other. Accordingly, the social and physical diversity of Shiraz's neighborhoods, the presence of different patterns of urban development, and the widespread implementation of access barriers across different parts of the city provide an opportunity to examine the perspectives of different stakeholder groups simultaneously.

Hence, Shiraz provides a suitable case for investigating the social and legal conflicts arising from the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs. In addition to elucidating the situation in Shiraz, the findings of this study can contribute to a broader understanding of this phenomenon and inform urban management policies in other Iranian cities facing similar challenges. This research examines and analyzes the perspectives of stakeholders, including residents of these alleys who seek to privatize residential cul-de-sacs by installing access barriers, as well as non-residents. The study seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the factors underlying these perspectives, identify the legal and social contexts shaping these conflicts, and propose strategies to manage them and achieve sustainable and equitable solutions.

Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative research methods, this study seeks to address the existing knowledge gap in this emerging urban phenomenon

and provide a basis for future policymaking in urban management and citizens' rights.

2. Theoretical and empirical background

In the tradition of Islamic urbanism, cul-de-sacs are not merely physical elements of the urban fabric; they also function as legal and social institutions that regulate neighborhood relations and preserve privacy. Cul-de-sacs are significant and meaningful elements in the spatial structure of Islamic cities, rooted in the cultural, social, and religious values of Islamic societies. In Islamic-Iranian urbanism, these alleys can be understood as the living rooms of the neighborhood, enclosed by three walls but open to the sky. Such alleys serve as transitional spaces between main streets and residential units, responding to the Islamic emphasis on privacy as well as residents' need for a safe environment (Kalak et al., 2023).

In traditional Iranian urbanism, access restriction to neighborhood spaces for non-residents was not achieved through walls and complete physical separation, but through careful design of the street network, limited points of access, spatial hierarchy, visual control, and the reinforcement of social surveillance (Tavassoli, 2015). These characteristics have been among the most important factors contributing to the security, identity, and sustainability of traditional Iranian neighborhoods. Residential cul-de-sacs in Iranian cities have traditionally served four main functions: preserving privacy and limiting intrusion by non-residents; enhancing security through residents' natural surveillance; responding to the hot and arid climate by providing shade and reducing the movement of hot winds; and strengthening neighborhood relations and collective identity by creating semi-private spaces for everyday social interaction (Tavassoli, 2015).

In contrast, many contemporary urban cul-de-sacs result primarily from land subdivision or traffic-oriented design and lack the social and identity-related functions characteristic of traditional neighborhoods. Nevertheless, they remain important structural elements of the urban fabric and function as intermediary spaces connecting different parts of the urban environment (Caneparo et al., 2023). However, the ownership, use, or control of these spaces has, in some cases, become a source of conflict among different stakeholder groups.

The privatization of residential cul-de-sacs through the installation of access barriers is theoretically consistent with the logic underlying the formation of gated

communities. Accordingly, examining the characteristics and consequences of this pattern can improve understanding of the social and legal dimensions of the central research problem. The literature on gated communities emerged in the early 1990s in the Global North (Morales, 2024). Gated communities, which developed in response to specific contextual conditions in Canada, the United States, and Europe (Alkan Bala, 2018), are residential developments characterized by controlled access, typically with a single entrance connecting the development to a larger public street. Based on Blakely and Snyder's (1997) framework, gated communities can be classified into three main categories: lifestyle, prestige, and security communities (Blakely & Snyder, 1997).

Gated communities – also described as “architectures of fear” (reflecting fears of neighbors, theft, and outsiders) – are created by transforming public space (belonging to all citizens) into private or semi-private space reserved for a particular community (Alkan Bala, 2018). Although such interventions may enhance residents' perceptions of security and control, studies indicate that they also generate broader consequences. The privatization of public spaces can increase residents' dependence on automobiles, reduce opportunities for social interaction, and impede emergency vehicles (Hochschild, 2015). Furthermore, restricted access and residents' physical isolation, fewer opportunities for incidental encounters in public spaces, and declining levels of urban social capital are among the other consequences associated with such forms of privatization (Putnam, 2001).

From this perspective, gated communities should not be understood merely as a physical or spatial development pattern; rather, they represent a reconfiguration of power relations, property rights, rights of use, control, and access to urban space. These processes create conflicts between residents' interests and the broader public right to access and use the city. One of the main dimensions of conflicts arising from the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs is the tension between residents' right to control and protect their living environment and citizens' broader right to access and use urban spaces freely. This tension has also been extensively discussed in the literature on the privatization of public space. The privatization of urban public spaces can give rise to two competing positions concerning the primacy of private rights or public rights over a particular place (Karakoç & Soylemez-Karakoç, 2023).

Many scholars argue that privately owned or managed public spaces, compared with conventional public spaces, exhibit lower levels of publicness and are subject to greater degrees of control and surveillance (Gałkowski & Antosz, 2022). Such forms of control can, in turn, give users a heightened sense of security and safety (Peiris & Fayas, 2022). However, although users

may value privatized spaces because of their perceived higher environmental quality and their more pleasant, cleaner, and safer environments, these spaces have frequently been criticized in the academic literature for restricting public access, redefining the boundaries of public space, and exacerbating inequalities in access to and enjoyment of the city (Leclercq & Pojani, 2023).

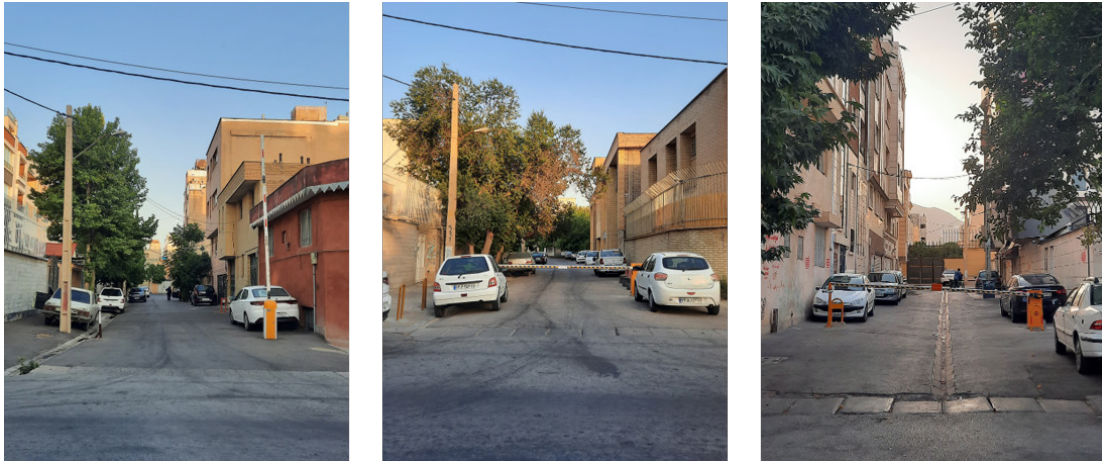


Figure 1. Images of access barriers and privatized cul-de-sacs in the city of Shiraz

Urban land disputes are fundamentally concerned with how property rights are defined, exercised, and enforced (Marx, 2016). Conflicts arising from the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs can therefore also be understood through the lens of property rights, as the central disagreement among stakeholders concerns the boundaries of rights to use and control urban space and to exclude others from accessing it. In contemporary cities, collective life within shared urban spaces has given rise to a different understanding of land and property (Mualam & Sotto, 2020), transforming property from a purely individual right into a right that also carries a social function. The definition of property is therefore a starting point for discussions of spatial justice and provides a basis for interpreting legal rules correctly (Merrill, 1998).

In this regard, scholars have conceptualized ownership not as a single, indivisible right, but as a bundle of rights and a modular system (Smith, 2012) that distinguishes among authorized applicants, users and claimants, owners, and full owners (Ostrom, 2003). Property rights comprise a set of hierarchical rights that can be conceptualized at three levels: use rights, which involve deriving direct and indirect benefits from a resource; control rights, which include management, exclusion, transaction, and monitoring; and reference rights, which include the rights to define

and allocate (Sikor et al., 2017). From this perspective, property rights extend beyond the right to exploit and use a resource and encompass powers related to control, access, definition, and transfer.

One of the most fundamental components of property rights is the right to exclude others from using or accessing a resource, commonly referred to as the gatekeeping right. From some scholars' perspective, this constitutes one of the defining characteristics of property (Merrill, 1998). This right can also be understood as underlying the formation of gated communities, where access control serves as a mechanism for exercising property rights and regulating space. In this regard, Katz (2008) argues that the primary purpose of a property system is not simply to exclude non-owners from a particular space, but rather to preserve the owner's authority to determine how that space is used, accessed, and managed.

From a property rights perspective, urban streets can be understood as commons. This concept has increasingly been examined in recent years by a wide range of scholars, including Marxists, autonomists, political ecologists, and feminists, as a framework for defending collective access to and participatory governance of urban spaces (Blomley, 2020). Accordingly, the governing principle is the simultaneous

use of the resource by all rights holders; no individual user has the right to appropriate or exploit it in a manner that deprives others of access (Heller, 1998). From this perspective, privatizing residential cul-de-sacs becomes both a social and legal issue because it alters the systems of access to and control over public space as a common resource, thereby blurring the boundary between public and private rights. The privatization of residential cul-de-sacs is associated with increased surveillance in affluent areas, intensified social segregation, gentrification, spatial fragmentation, and the establishment of boundaries between “insiders” and “outsiders” (Lippert et al., 2024). In the absence of justice-oriented legal and regulatory frameworks, these processes may conflict with the principles of spatial justice and equal access to public spaces.

As noted, ambiguity within the legal framework exacerbates conflicts surrounding the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs and the installation of access barriers, as the absence of clear regulations creates room for stakeholders to develop divergent interpretations of the boundaries between public and private rights. Iranian urban legislation contains no explicit provisions concerning access barriers, and the regulations governing this issue lack sufficient clarity, consistency, and coherence. Although certain legal provisions, including Article 24 of the Civil Code, Article 55 and Note 6 of Article 96 of the Municipalities Law, as well as documents related to passive defense, are

indirectly relevant to street management, the protection of public property, and security requirements, none establishes a specific framework for the installation, management, and monitoring of access barriers in residential cul-de-sacs. This legal vacuum creates scope for differing interpretations of the powers and responsibilities of residents and urban management institutions. It further complicates the social and legal conflicts arising from the privatization of these spaces.

To explain the origins of legal conflicts arising from the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs, the hierarchical framework of property rights proposed by Sikor et al. (2017), presented in Table 1, can be applied. This framework demonstrates that the conflict is not simply a matter of ownership in a particular space; rather, it concerns the distribution of rights to use, control, and make decisions regarding that space. Within the theoretical framework of property rights, the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs is consistently accompanied by a trade-off between the rights of residents and those of non-resident citizens. As the scope of residents’ rights to use and control expands, the potential for restricting the general public’s rights to access and use the streets increases. The most significant point of contention concerns the right of exclusion, as this right enables residents to restrict others’ access to a space that is inherently part of the urban street network.

Table 1. Analysis of conflicts arising from the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs based on the hierarchy of property rights of Sikor et al. (2017)

Level of rights	Right	Residents’ benefits	Conflict with the rights of non-resident citizens
Use rights	Use of direct benefits	Increased security and tranquility and reduced disruptive traffic	Reduced citizens’ right to free access to public streets and increased temporal or spatial costs of passage
	Use of indirect benefits	Increased property values, improved environmental quality, and enhanced social cohesion	Transfer of some of the privatization costs to other citizens through increased traffic, reduced accessibility, and greater spatial inequality
Control rights	Management	Authority to manage the cul-de-sac, determine entry regulations, and maintain the access barrier	Decision-making regarding public space without the participation of citizens who use the space but do not reside there
	Exclusion	Control over the entry of unauthorized persons and restriction of traffic	Restriction of the right of passage, access, and legitimate use of citizens, service providers, or visitors of the cul-de-sac
	Transaction	Delegation of the management or operation of the access barrier and allocation of related costs	Transformation of part of public space into a resource for exclusive interests, without other citizens having a share in its benefits or decision-making
	Monitoring	Control of movement and surveillance of the use of space	Informal surveillance of individuals and the creation of a sense of exclusion among non-residents

Level of rights	Right	Residents' benefits	Conflict with the rights of non-resident citizens
Authoritative rights	Definition	Defining the cul-de-sac as a space subject to discretionary control to exercise control rights	Diminished role of the principle of "public interest" in defining the function of streets and the prioritization of group interests over collective rights
	Allocation	Allocation of control rights to residents by influential urban institutions	Inequality in the distribution of urban rights; some citizens acquire control rights over public space while others are deprived of such rights

As shown in Table 1, conflicts arising from the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs are evident across all levels of property rights; however, they are particularly pronounced at the level of control rights, especially the right of exclusion. At this level, the expansion of residents' authority to control entry and exit is directly associated with the restriction of non-resident citizens' rights to access and use urban streets. In contrast, use rights primarily concern differences in the distribution of the benefits and costs associated with privatization, while reference rights address the question of who has the authority to define the function of a space and allocate control rights. Therefore, the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs is not merely a physical or managerial intervention; rather, it is a process through which the redistribution of property rights reproduces social and legal conflicts and generates divergent perceptions of spatial justice among different urban groups.

Drawing on the literature on the enclosure and publicizing of urban space, this study proposes a conceptual framework for explaining different forms of collective action in relation to urban space. From this perspective, collective actions can be classified into two categories of "enclosing collective actions" and "public-making collective actions," based on their effects on the use, control, and accessibility of public spaces. Rather than emerging from an established classification in the literature, this distinction results from integrating and reinterpreting concepts developed in the theoretical literature within the conceptual framework proposed by this study to analyze the phenomenon under investigation.

Within this framework, enclosing collective actions refer to actions undertaken by citizens, often in response to needs such as security, tranquility, or improved quality of life, that nevertheless reinforce the logic of spatial enclosure and territorial control by restricting access for other citizens. In contrast, public-making collective actions refer to those actions that strengthen the public sphere, expand the right to equal access to urban spaces, and increase citizen

participation in shaping and using these spaces.

The distinction between these two categories of action therefore lies not in whether they are public or private, but in their spatial and social consequences. Both types may emerge from citizen participation and collective initiative; however, public-making actions broaden the scope of interests to encompass the wider citizenry, whereas enclosing actions, although they may generate substantial benefits for residents, confine those benefits to the territory of a particular group and, in some cases, are accompanied by reduced public access and a weakening of the public character of urban spaces. Accordingly, this study introduces this distinction as a proposed conceptual framework that can also be applied and further evaluated in the analysis of other forms of collective action and their implications for the production and reproduction of urban space.

The redistribution of property rights in urban spaces extends beyond a mere legal transformation; it provides a basis for processes of spatial enclosure and privatization that have far-reaching implications for spatial justice, urban planning, and social relations. Within this framework, processes of spatial enclosure can take three main forms: privatization, dispossession, and capitalist subjectification (Hodkinson, 2012). In recent decades, the expansion of neoliberal urbanization, housing policies, real estate market stabilization, rising levels of crime and violence, and increasing socioeconomic inequalities have intensified planned forms of socio-spatial fragmentation, including the development of gated communities (Morales, 2024).

In this context, neoliberalism, deregulation, and informal forms of governance have weakened urban planning's capacity to safeguard the public interest (Borsdorf & Hidalgo, 2008). Consequently, gated communities and cities not only challenge urban planning but also pose a challenge for social policy, particularly in the context of the privatization of public spaces (Borsdorf & Hidalgo, 2008). Such spaces are characterized by private management and restricted

public access to urban areas, a condition that conflicts with the principles of inclusive cities and the concept of the “right to the city” (Bandauko et al., 2022).

In contrast to the tendency toward the privatization of urban spaces and residential cul-de-sacs, several theoretical and practical approaches emphasize preserving the public sphere, citizen participation, and equal access to urban spaces. In the present study, these approaches are conceptualized as “public-making collective actions.” The right to the city, popular urbanism, participatory urbanism, and tactical urbanism, understood as forms of public-making collective action, encompass a range of practices aimed at reclaiming the public sphere, expanding equal access to urban spaces, strengthening citizen participation, and advancing spatial justice. Through grassroots initiatives, small-scale interventions, the creation of participatory spaces, and claims to the right to the city, these actions strengthen the public sphere and create opportunities to realize collective interests.

The right to the city provides the language of claim-making and the critical framework, whereas popular urbanism represents the language of action and the lived experience through which such claims are articulated. Unequal patterns of resource and opportunity distribution, which disadvantage most individuals and social groups living in cities, have led critical urban theorists to articulate citizens’ demands to urban policymakers and decision-makers through the concept of the “right to the city” (Eshtiaghi & Sharepour, 2021). In both theory and practice, the right to the city has increasingly emerged as a broad and effective framework for articulating a range of demands that must be actively pursued and critically examined (Marcuse, 2009).

A key dimension of Lefebvre’s theory concerns the production of space and the right to urban citizenship (Afrouz & Sajadzadeh, 2024). As Mark Purcell argues, the right to the city entails reclaiming the power to produce urban space from dominant institutions and transferring greater control over this process to residents (Purcell, 2002). Peter Marcuse similarly emphasizes that the right to the city involves not only access to urban services and spaces, but also the right to redefine and transform spatial structures (Marcuse, 2009).

Consistent with the concept of the right to the city, popular urbanism provides a practical approach through which residents can reclaim urban spaces and reshape them in accordance with collective needs. In

this sense, the theory of the right to the city and the practice of popular urbanism complement one another: as forms of public-making collective action, they create possibilities for advancing spatial justice, strengthening citizen participation, and promoting collective agency in the production and governance of urban space.

Alongside these approaches, tactical urbanism, which relies on small-scale interventions and direct citizen participation, represents one of the most prominent examples of public-oriented action in addressing urban issues. It seeks to reclaim and reconfigure urban spaces, strengthen social participation, promote spatial justice, and contribute to changes in formal urban planning processes (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). As an independent, bottom-up approach that involves citizens in decision-making processes (Tuță et al., 2025), tactical urbanism emphasizes small-scale and creative initiatives to make communities more dynamic, improved, and livable (Shuttle, 2017).

This approach promotes the collective and public use of urban space while seeking to circumvent cumbersome administrative bureaucracies, and it sometimes adopts a critical stance toward institutional interventions at the city scale (Cariello et al., 2021). Tactical urbanism has continued to gain attention as an approach that enables rapid responses to urban challenges through small-scale interventions and community participation (Silva, 2016).

Do-it-yourself (DIY) urban activism is another manifestation of popular and spontaneous forms of urban action. By emphasizing citizens’ direct involvement in the production, maintenance, and management of urban spaces, this approach primarily strengthens public capacities and enhances local communities’ role in urban governance. DIY urban activism can potentially fall within both the enclosing and public-making categories of collective action. Nevertheless, its overall orientation is more closely aligned with public-making collective action, as its primary objectives are to respond to public needs, improve the quality of the urban environment, and address deficiencies in formal urban management through citizen participation.

At the same time, DIY urban activism is subject to various sociopolitical constraints (Marr & Mususa, 2023). Within this framework, community members may initiate and implement interventions themselves rather than relying on planners or municipal authorities. However, this same capacity for self-organization can also be mobilized to advance group

interests and exert control over urban space, including by installing access barriers or restricting access. Nevertheless, this function is considered less prevalent and less significant than its public-making role.

Another approach relevant to urban self-organization and the creation of access barriers is informal urbanism. This form of urbanism is a widespread reality that encompasses contemporary societies and occurs across diverse geographical contexts (Marques, 2025). The concept encompasses a broad range of urban phenomena, extending from informal settlements to social innovation and collective organization, as well as practices such as informal transportation, street markets, and user-generated public spaces (Galdini & De Nardis, 2023).

However, within the context of the present study, informal urbanism can be interpreted primarily as a form of enclosing collective action rather than as an approach oriented toward public-making. This is because the installation of access barriers, the control of access, and the occupation of portions of public space often occur outside formal mechanisms of urban planning and governance. This does not imply, however, that informal urbanism is inherently enclosing. In some contexts, informal practices can help produce public spaces, strengthen social interaction, and compensate for institutional deficiencies. Nevertheless, in the specific case of the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs, its enclosing dimension is more prominent.

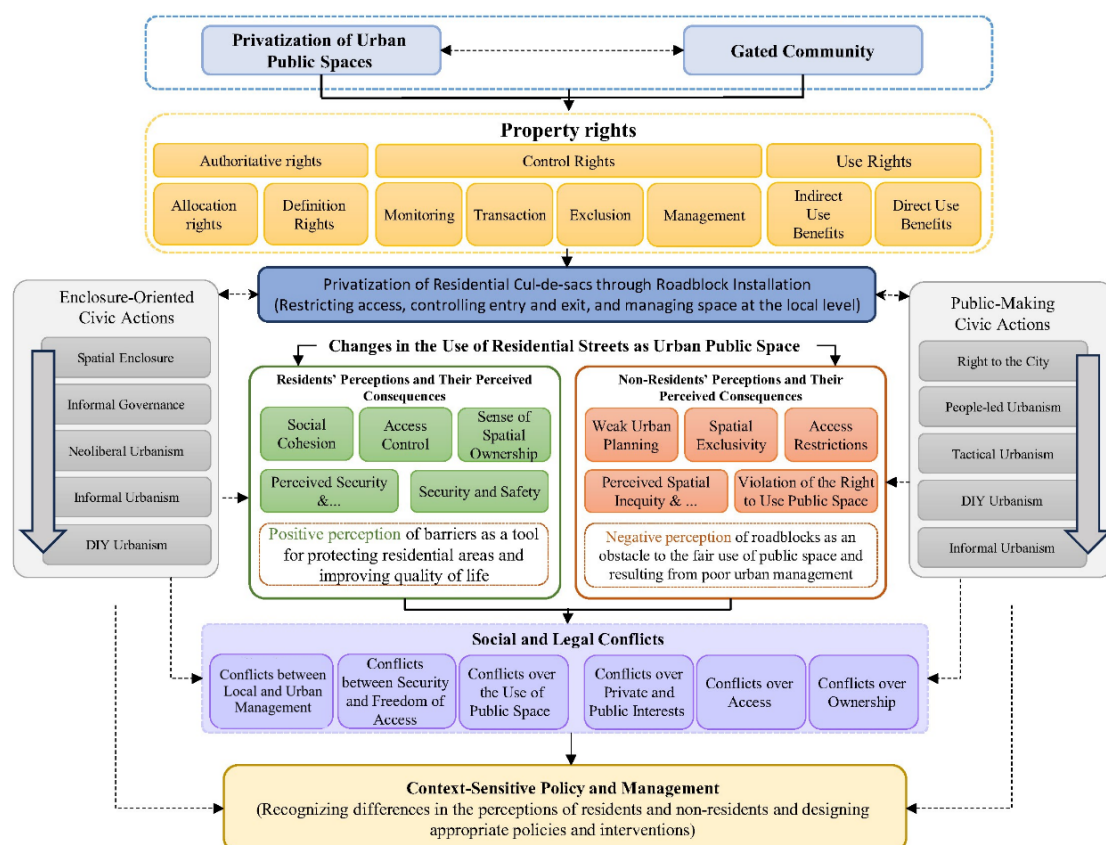


Figure 2. Conceptual research model of the privatization of residential Cul-de-Sacs through the installation of access barriers

As the conceptual model of the research demonstrates, the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs through the installation of roadblocks can be understood as a legal, social, spatial, and multidimensional phenomenon. This phenomenon emerges at the intersection of two approaches: the “privatization of urban public spaces” and “gated communities.” Within this framework, residents’ exercise of use, control, and access rights

provides the basis for restricting access, regulating ingress and egress, and undertaking localized forms of spatial management.

Alongside this process, the conceptual model, drawing on the existing theoretical literature, highlights the role of two distinct forms of public action. On the one hand, “enclosing practices” encompass measures such as the privatization of public space, spatial enclosure,

informal governance, neoliberal urbanism, and informal urbanism. These practices tend to reinforce enclosure-oriented strategies aimed at enhancing security, controlling access, and protecting local interests. On the other hand, “public-making practices,” informed by the right to the city, people-centered urbanism, participatory urbanism, tactical urbanism, and DIY activism, seek to maintain public accessibility, enhance the quality of public space, and safeguard collective interests and spatial justice.

The tension between these two modes of action reflects the broader conflict between the privatization and publicization of urban space within urban governance and management. However, such interventions should not be understood merely as physical or managerial measures; rather, different groups of residents and non-residents perceive their meanings and consequences differently. From residents’ perspective, installing barriers is associated with enhanced security, a stronger sense of spatial ownership, greater social cohesion, increased control over access, and an improved quality of life. By contrast, non-residents may perceive such interventions as indicative of inadequate urban planning, restrictions on their right to benefit from public space, diminished spatial justice, and the erosion of the city’s physical and social cohesion.

These divergent perceptions and assessments contribute to social and legal conflicts concerning property rights, access rights, public interests, and tensions between local and city-wide forms of urban management. Accordingly, as the conceptual model illustrates, addressing this phenomenon requires moving beyond purely physical or managerial approaches toward context-sensitive policy responses. Such policies should recognize and account for differences in the perceptions, interests, and claims of relevant stakeholders, thereby seeking to balance the provision of local security with the preservation of public rights and spatial justice.

3. Methodology

This research is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-analytical in nature. It employs a mixed-methods approach based on an exploratory sequential design, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. This approach enables the research to address both the depth of the phenomenon through qualitative inquiry and its breadth through quantitative analysis. It also allows simultaneous examination of the objective and subjective dimensions of residential

alley privatization, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of its socio-spatial consequences.

The mixed-methods approach was selected due to the nature of the research problem. The privatization of residential alleys and the installation of roadblocks encompass not only physical and managerial dimensions but also complex social, legal, and perceptual dimensions. To date, no comprehensive theoretical framework or standardized, context-specific instruments have been developed in Iran to measure these dimensions systematically. Therefore, the first stage of the research sought to identify and conceptualize the key factors and dimensions associated with this phenomenon from the perspectives of relevant experts and urban managers. The resulting findings were then operationalized into a quantitative instrument and empirically tested within the target population.

Accordingly, the qualitative component primarily explored and generated concepts, while the quantitative component measured, compared, and generalized the findings derived from the qualitative phase. In the qualitative phase, the study population consisted of managers and experts involved in or knowledgeable about the phenomenon of roadblock installation in the city of Shiraz. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: having a direct role in policymaking, implementation, or oversight of issues related to roadblocks; and possessing sufficient familiarity with the legal, managerial, and social dimensions of the phenomenon. Sampling was conducted purposefully using the snowball method, with the criterion of professional familiarity with the topic of roadblocks and their legal and social challenges. To capture a range of relevant institutional perspectives, participants were recruited from several organizations, including the Deputy of Architecture and Urban Planning of Shiraz Municipality, the Deputy of Transportation of Shiraz Municipality, the Municipal Districts 1 and 6 of Shiraz, and the Traffic Police.

Data for this phase were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol focused on the institutional and perceptual dimensions of the phenomenon, as well as its consequences in relation to the research topic. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Specifically, after 10 interviews, no new concepts or codes emerged, and participants’ responses largely reiterated findings identified in previous interviews. Moreover,

participants in the final stages of the study did not introduce new eligible individuals to continue the interviews; therefore, the sampling process ended after 10 interviews.

The primary outcome of this phase, generated through thematic analysis, was a set of social and legal factors associated with the emergence of conflicts surrounding roadblock installation, along with their consequences. These findings subsequently informed the development of the questionnaire used in the quantitative phase.

In the quantitative phase, a survey design and questionnaire were employed. The survey allows the views and attitudes of a larger segment of the target population to be measured quantitatively and the results to be analyzed statistically. The quantitative study population comprised two groups: residents and non-residents of privatized cul-de-sacs in the city of Shiraz. Participants were selected using purposive and convenience sampling, comprising 30 residents and 60 non-residents.

The use of convenience sampling constitutes one of the limitations of this study. To mitigate potential bias associated with this sampling approach, efforts were made to select participants from different areas of Shiraz and from a range of privatized alleys, thereby ensuring adequate diversity within the sample.

The difference in sample size between the two groups reflects differences in the size of the accessible populations and the feasibility of recruiting respondents. Specifically, the non-resident population is larger than the resident population. To adhere to statistical principles and ensure an approximately normal distribution of the data based on the Central

Limit Theorem, the resident group was assigned a sample size of 30 participants. To increase statistical power and improve the precision of between-group comparisons, the non-resident group was sampled at twice this size, comprising 60 participants. Thus, a total of 90 valid questionnaires were included in the final analysis.

Given the nature of the study and the use of the non-parametric Mann–Whitney U test, the unequal sample sizes between the two groups are statistically acceptable and do not compromise the validity of the findings. The data collection instrument was a questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale, covering the perceptual and institutional dimensions of roadblock installation, as well as its social and spatial consequences. The questionnaire content validity was established through expert review by urban planning specialists. In addition, the questionnaire reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.723.

4. Findings

The thematic analysis of interviews with managers and experts familiar with the phenomenon of roadblock installation in Shiraz identified four overarching themes. These themes encompass the factors contributing to roadblock installation, including managerial and institutional challenges and residents' attitudes, as well as the consequences of roadblock installation, including their spatial and social consequences. The four overarching themes were further developed through 13 organizing themes, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Basic, organizing, and overarching themes identified through interview coding

Overarching themes	Organizing themes	Basic themes
Institutional and managerial challenges	Weak urban governance and fragmented institutional decision-making	Multiple institutions involved in decision-making, including the Traffic Police, Provincial Governor's Office, and Traffic Council; installation of roadblocks with the approval of the municipal district, local police, or police station; lack of acceptance of roadblocks by urban management authorities; and related issues
	Lack of a clear legal and regulatory framework	Absence of specific rules and regulations governing roadblocks; illegal and technically inappropriate roadblocks; lack of a clearly defined legal procedure; existing regulations to support keeping alleys open; limited enforcement by legislators; discretionary application of regulations by managers; obtaining permits through a limited number of signatures and approvals; permits lacking full legal guarantees; issuance of permits based on expert assessment and judicial approval; and related issues

Overarching themes	Organizing themes	Basic themes
Institutional and managerial challenges	Traffic problems and deficiencies in transport planning and parking provision	Insufficient parking in the city's CBD; installation of roadblocks as a measure to prevent indiscriminate parking; conflicts between residents and non-residents over vehicles parked in front of residential parking entrances; installation of roadblocks due to inadequate police enforcement concerning vehicles parked adjacent to residential parking facilities; the possibility of managing parking through signage without installing physical roadblocks; traffic-restriction measures; and related issues
	Weaknesses in land-use planning	Installation of roadblocks adjacent to streets with high trip-generation levels; installation of roadblocks near high trip-generating land uses; roadblocks in relation to traffic-generating land uses; and related issues
Residents' perceptions	Residents' sense of insecurity	Residence of affluent groups; residence of influential individuals; perceived need to ensure residential security; concerns about property theft; previous experiences of conflict or tension with non-residents; perceived threats associated with unfamiliar vehicles parked in front of homes; and related issues
	Residents' perceptions of spatial ownership	Residents' sense of ownership and priority regarding the use of the alley in which they live; belief in the necessity of establishing boundaries between spaces perceived as belonging to residents and public space
Spatial consequences	Emergency access and response challenges	Importance attached to civil defense and passive defense measures; restricted access for ambulances and fire services; difficulties in emergency access and response; use of roadblocks as a means of managing access to public transport; and related issues
	Restricted access networks and increased traffic congestion	Increased vehicle density and congestion at entrances near roadblocks; restriction of the access network and reduced spatial connectivity; formation of traffic bottlenecks during peak hours; encouraging some users to change their travel mode; increased likelihood of double parking around roadblocks; and related issues
Social consequences	Strengthening local attachment and place identity	Creation of a sense of belonging among residents; residents' participation and contributions to installation and maintenance costs; recognition of streets as public spaces; greater convenience; control over social discrimination; formation of place identity through spatial differentiation; and related issues
	Enhancement of social security	Prevention of theft through control over the entry of strangers; increased social security and perceived safety; greater opportunities for residents to become acquainted with and know one another; and related issues
	Social segregation	Social discrimination and segregation; formation of semi-private territories within public space; lack of acceptance and protests by non-resident citizens; and related issues
	Restrictions on access to and use of urban infrastructure	Restriction of public access to the use of urban space; obstruction of citizens' ability to exercise their rights; perceived inequality in access to and use of urban spaces; and related issues
	Rent-seeking and increased inequality	Psychological injustice; the need to safeguard citizens' rights; the need for inclusive and universally applicable regulations; unequal access to privileges and decision-making; reliance on personal connections rather than formal mechanisms; circumvention of regulations to secure private interests; reduced social trust resulting from the use of personal connections; and related issues

Based on findings from research on the installation of roadblocks and the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs, four overarching themes were identified, each

comprising a substantial number of basic and organizing themes. Accordingly, the resulting thematic map is presented in Figure 3.

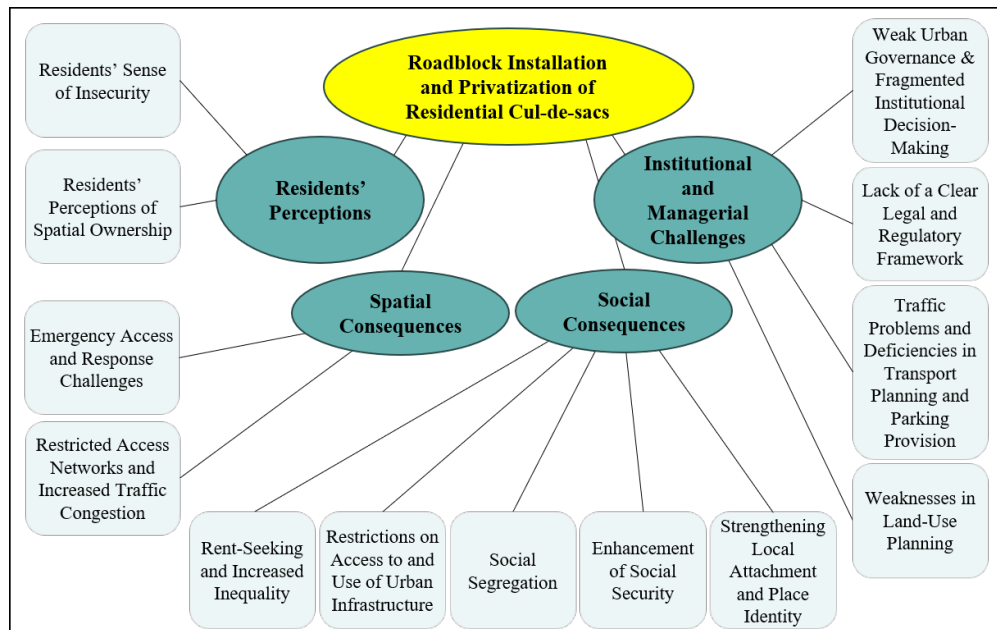


Figure 3. Thematic map of the factors and consequences of roadblock installation

As mentioned earlier, the findings from the qualitative phase provided the basis for developing the quantitative research instrument (questionnaire). Accordingly, the final output of the qualitative phase, derived through thematic analysis, informed the design of the questionnaire in the quantitative phase.

To this end, the indicators identified from the themes emerging from the qualitative analysis, together with those derived from the theoretical literature review (Figure 4), were converted into questionnaire items. These items were then used to develop the final research instrument.

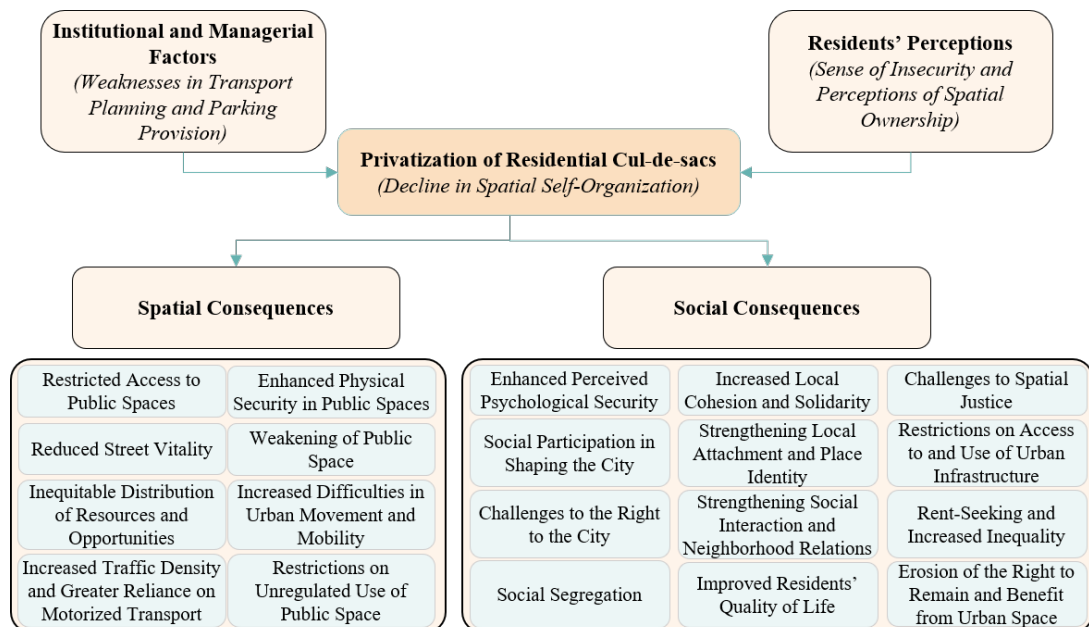


Figure 4. Identification of the factors and indicators influencing the privatization of residential Cul-de-sacs, the installation of access barriers, and their consequences

In the quantitative phase, the perceived importance and severity of these factors among residents and

non-residents in the city of Shiraz were assessed using the non-parametric Mann–Whitney U test. As shown

in the table, the results indicate a statistically significant difference between residents' and non-residents' perceptions of some spatial and social factors, as well

as the consequences associated with installing access barriers.

Table 3. Summary of the Mann–Whitney U test results and assessment of residents' and non-residents' perceptions of the factors contributing to the privatization of residential Cul-de-sacs and the consequences of installing access barriers

Factors contributing to the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs		Group	N	Mean rank	U	W	Z	Sig. (2-tailed)
Inefficiency of urban governance	Weaknesses in transport planning and parking provision	Resident	30	36.67	635.000	1100.000	-2.404	0.016
		Non-resident	60	49.92				
Residents' perceptions	Sense of insecurity	Resident	30	44.85	880.500	1345.500	-0.178	0.859
		Non-resident	60	45.83				
	Attitudes toward space ownership	Resident	30	61.23	428.000	2258.000	-4.250	0.000
		Non-resident	60	37.63				
	Enhancement of physical security in public space	Resident	30	55.32	605.500	2435.500	-2.705	0.007
		Non-resident	60	40.59				
	Reduction in street vitality	Resident	30	45.42	897.500	1362.500	-0.022	0.982
		Non-resident	60	45.54				
	Deterioration of public spaces	Resident	30	41.73	787.000	1252.000	-1.020	0.308
		Non-resident	60	47.38				
	Creation of mobility and circulation problems	Resident	30	34.18	560.500	1025.500	-3.124	0.002
		Non-resident	60	51.16				
	Restrictions on unrestricted use of public space	Resident	30	34.55	571.500	1036.500	-3.009	0.003
		Non-resident	60	50.98				
	Restricted access to public spaces	Resident	30	45.97	886.000	2716.000	-0.143	0.886
		Non-resident	60	45.27				
	Inequity in the distribution of resources and opportunities	Resident	30	44.35	865.500	1330.500	-0.310	0.757
		Non-resident	60	46.08				
	Increased traffic congestion and changes in travel modes	Resident	30	46.80	861.000	2691.000	-0.362	0.717
		Non-resident	60	44.85				
	Increased local cohesion and solidarity	Resident	30	57.02	554.500	2384.500	-3.031	0.002
		Non-resident	60	39.74				
	Strengthening sense of place and local identity	Resident	30	56.47	571.000	2401.000	-3.156	0.002
		Non-resident	60	40.02				
	Strengthening social interaction and neighborhood relations	Resident	30	52.77	682.000	2512.000	-1.994	0.046
		Non-resident	60	41.87				
	Improvement in quality of life	Resident	30	54.80	621.000	2451.000	-2.723	0.006
		Non-resident	60	40.85				
	Enhanced psychological security	Resident	30	49.80	771.000	2601.000	-1.199	0.230
		Non-resident	60	43.35				

Factors contributing to the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs		Group	N	Mean rank	U	W	Z	Sig. (2-tailed)
Social consequences	Social participation in shaping the city	Resident	30	42.78	818.500	1283.500	-0.736	0.462
		Non-resident	60	46.86				
	Right-to-the-city challenge (equal access)	Resident	30	38.62	693.500	1158.500	-1.861	0.063
		Non-resident	60	48.94				
	Social segregation	Resident	30	43.95	853.500	1318.500	-0.417	0.676
		Non-resident	60	46.28				
	Spatial justice challenge	Resident	30	42.07	797.000	1262.000	-0.917	0.359
		Non-resident	60	47.22				
	Restrictions on the use of infrastructure	Resident	30	34.87	581.000	1046.000	-3.099	0.002
		Non-resident	60	50.82				
	Rent-seeking and increased discrimination	Resident	30	45.17	890.000	1355.000	-0.095	0.924
		Non-resident	60	45.67				
	Erosion of the right to remain and use space	Resident	30	43.97	854.000	1319.000	-0.417	0.676
		Non-resident	60	46.27				

According to Table 3, the Mann–Whitney U test indicates a statistically significant difference between the residents' and non-residents' perceptions regarding the weakness of transportation planning and parking provision ($U = 635.000$, $p = 0.016 < 0.05$). In contrast, no statistically significant difference was observed between the two groups in perceived insecurity ($U = 880.500$, $p = 0.859 > 0.05$).

In the Mann–Whitney U test, a lower mean rank, when the difference is statistically significant, indicates a more positive, less negative, or less challenging assessment of the respective indicator. Accordingly, since the mean rank for non-residents regarding the weakness of transportation planning and parking provision (49.92) is higher than that of residents (36.67), non-residents perceive this issue as significantly more severe than residents and consider it to have a greater influence on the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs.

Attitudes toward space ownership were also identified as statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Given that the mean rank for residents (61.23) is substantially higher than that for non-residents (37.63), the results suggest that residents have a stronger sense of spatial ownership and attachment to the alley space. In other words, residents are more likely to perceive the alley as part of their territorial domain. In contrast, the non-residents are less likely to share this perception and tend to regard the alley primarily as a public space.

Furthermore, a comparison of the consequences of installing access barriers between residents and non-residents indicates statistically significant differences between the two groups given several spatial consequences, including enhancing physical security within the space, creating traffic segregation and promoting mobility justice in the city, and restricting the free use of public space. Because the mean rank for residents regarding the consequence of enhancing physical security in the space is higher than that of non-residents ($40.59 < 55.32$), the finding suggests that residents perceive the enhancement of physical security resulting from blocked alleys more strongly and evaluate it more positively.

Regarding the consequence of the creation of mobility and circulation problems in the city, the mean rank for residents (34.18) is lower than that of non-residents (51.16). A similar pattern is observed for the consequence of restricting the free use of public space, with mean ranks of 34.55 for residents and 50.98 for non-residents. These findings indicate that residents tend to evaluate these consequences more positively, or perceive them as less problematic, than non-residents.

Regarding the social consequences, the results of the Mann–Whitney U analysis indicate statistically significant differences between residents and non-residents in terms of increased local cohesion and solidarity, strengthened sense of belonging and local

identity, enhanced social interaction and neighborly relations, improved quality of life, and restrictions on access to and use of infrastructure. Residents perceive the installation of access barriers as contributing to greater local cohesion and solidarity, strengthening their sense of belonging and local identity, enhancing social interactions and neighborly relations, and improving their quality of life, whereas non-residents report these positive effects to a lesser extent.

Furthermore, residents of these alleys perceive the installation of access barriers as having no adverse effect on other citizens' rights to use urban spaces and as not undermining other citizens' rights to access and use urban infrastructure. Overall, these findings indicate that residents and non-residents have different experiences and perceptions of the social dimensions and consequences associated with urban life and the installation of access barriers.

Table 4. Interpretation of the significant factors and consequences identified by the Mann–Whitney U test

Factors contributing to the installation of access barriers and their consequences		Significance level	Effect size	Residents' mean rank	Non-residents' mean rank	Interpretation of results
Urban governance inefficiency	Weaknesses in transportation planning and parking provision	Significant, $p < 0.05$	0.25	36.67	49.92	Non-residents perceive the inefficiency of urban governance in transportation planning and parking provision as a more influential factor in installing access barriers than do residents.
	Attitudes toward space ownership	Significant, $p < 0.05$	0.45	61.23	37.63	Residents report a stronger sense of ownership over the alley in which they reside than non-residents.
Spatial consequences	Enhancement of physical security in the space	Significant, $p < 0.05$	0.29	40.59	55.32	Residents are more likely than non-residents to perceive the installation of access barriers as contributing to enhanced physical security in the space.
	Creation of mobility and circulation constraints in the city	Significant, $p < 0.05$	0.33	34.18	51.16	Non-residents are more likely than residents to perceive access barriers as creating problems for urban mobility and circulation.
	Restrictions on the unrestricted use of public space	Significant, $p < 0.05$	0.32	34.55	50.98	Non-residents are more likely than residents to perceive access barriers as restricting the free use of public spaces.
Social consequences	Increased local social cohesion and solidarity	Significant, $p < 0.05$	0.32	57.02	39.74	Residents are more likely than non-residents to perceive access barriers as contributing to increased social cohesion and solidarity within the neighborhood.
	Strengthened sense of belonging and local identity	Significant, $p < 0.05$	0.33	56.47	40.02	Residents are more likely than non-residents to perceive access barriers as contributing to a stronger sense of belonging and local identity.
	Enhanced social interaction and neighborly relations	Significant, $p < 0.05$	0.21	52.77	41.87	Residents are more likely than non-residents to perceive access barriers as contributing to enhanced social interaction and neighborly relations.
	Improved standard of living	Significant, $p < 0.05$	0.29	54.80	40.85	Residents are more likely than non-residents to perceive the installation of access barriers as contributing to an improved standard of living in the neighborhood.
	Restrictions on access to and use of urban infrastructure	Significant, $p < 0.05$	0.33	34.87	50.82	Non-residents are more likely than residents to perceive access barriers as restricting access to and use of urban infrastructure.

In addition to statistical significance, an examination of the effect sizes associated with the differences indicates that, based on Cohen's (1998) criteria, the magnitude of the differences in residents and non-residents perceptions across most variables ranges from small to medium ($0.21 \leq r \leq 0.45$). The largest effect size is observed for attitudes toward space ownership ($r = 0.45$), indicating a relatively substantial difference between the two groups in their perceptions of the right to occupy, appropriate, and exercise control over neighborhood space.

The variables concerning the creation of urban mobility and circulation problems, restrictions on the free use of public space, increased local social cohesion, strengthened sense of belonging and local identity, and restrictions on access to and use of urban infrastructure exhibit medium effect sizes. This suggests that, beyond being statistically significant, the differences between the two groups are also substantively relevant from an urban planning perspective.

By contrast, variables such as urban governance inefficiency, enhancement of physical security, improvement of the standard of living, and strengthening of social interactions have small effect sizes. This indicates that, although the differences in perceptions between residents and non-residents are statistically significant, their practical magnitude is relatively limited.

Overall, the differences in perceptions between residents and non-residents are predominantly small to moderate. This suggests that the two groups are not fundamentally opposed in their views; rather, their perceptions diverge more noticeably on issues related to space ownership, access, mobility and circulation, and the use of public space.

However, although the effect sizes for most variables fall within the small-to-moderate range, these findings remain practically significant from an urban planning and public space management perspective. Even moderate differences in perceptions can have important implications for decision-making and the formulation of neighborhood management policies, particularly regarding authorizing the installation of access barriers, managing traffic and circulation, and safeguarding public access to urban space.

The observed divergence in perceptions between residents and non-residents points to a potential tension between local interests and the broader public interest in the city, both of which need to be considered simultaneously in urban management and policy

decisions. Accordingly, from a policy perspective, the findings suggest that unilateral approaches – whether providing unrestricted support for the installation of access barriers or seeking their complete removal – are unlikely to address the interests and expectations of all relevant stakeholders adequately.

It should be emphasized that the purpose of this study and its findings was not merely to establish the existence of a statistically significant difference between residents' and non-residents' perceptions of the installation of access barriers. Rather, the findings demonstrate that these differences are rooted in the distinct ways in which the two groups perceive, experience, and derive benefits from urban space. Based on their lived experience of residing in residential cul-de-sacs equipped with access barriers, residents tend to regard such barriers as a means of enhancing security, maintaining tranquility, strengthening neighborly relations, and improving quality of life. By contrast, non-resident citizens tend to perceive access barriers primarily as a mechanism that restricts access, disrupts mobility and circulation, and limits equitable access to and use of public space. This divergence in perceptions reflects an underlying tension between local interests and the broader public interest in the management of urban space.

From the perspective of property rights theory, the findings suggest that, although residents are not the legal owners of public rights-of-way, their continuous presence and social investment in the residential environment have contributed to the development of a sense of de facto ownership and territoriality over the alley space. This sense of ownership leads residents to perceive the installation of access barriers as a legitimate measure for protecting their residential territory and securing its direct and indirect benefits. Non-residents, however, tend to perceive the same measure as a restriction on access to a space that is legally regarded as part of the city's public realm.

Accordingly, the conflict between residents and non-residents is not simply a dispute over ownership of access-controlled streets; rather, it concerns the allocation and exercise of rights of access, use, control, and decision-making over these spaces.

The research findings are also consistent with the concept of the "right to the city" as a form of public action. From this perspective, urban space belongs to all citizens, and everyone should have the right to access, use, and participate in the production and reproduction of urban space. Within such a framework, although the installation of access barriers may

address the security and well-being needs of residents living in residential cul-de-sacs, restricting access for other citizens may undermine the principle of equal access to and use of urban space. Accordingly, the divergence in perceptions between residents and non-residents can be understood as reflecting their different interpretations of the right to the city and the legitimate boundaries of access to and use of public space.

At the same time, the findings indicate that these restrictions have not yet reached a level that would lead to organized collective action or spontaneous citizen mobilization to reclaim these spaces as public spaces. In other words, although there are indications of dissatisfaction among non-residents concerning restricted access and unequal opportunities to use urban space, such dissatisfaction has not yet developed into widespread demands or forms of social resistance. Nevertheless, continued privatization and enclosure of public rights-of-way may, in the long term, contribute to a growing sense of spatial injustice, intensify tensions between local and broader public interests, and ultimately generate social demands for redefining the governance, management, and accessibility of public spaces. This constitutes an important warning for urban governance: security and quality-of-life concerns of residents need to be balanced with the right of all citizens to equitable access to urban space. Adopting participatory and transparent governance mechanisms can help achieve this balance before dispersed dissatisfaction escalates into overt social conflict.

Furthermore, consistent with the literature on enclosure and the gradual privatization of public space, these findings show that physical control of access to public rights-of-way can gradually transform the boundary between public space and private territory, thereby facilitating the conversion of portions of public space into semi-private domains. From a spatial justice perspective, the divergence in perceptions between the two groups also suggests that the distribution of benefits and costs associated with installing access barriers is uneven. Residents receive a greater share of local benefits, such as enhanced security and social cohesion, whereas other citizens bear a substantial proportion of the associated social costs, including restricted access, increased mobility and circulation constraints, and reduced opportunities to use public space.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of participatory urban governance. Under such a

governance approach, decisions about installing access barriers should not be based solely on the neighborhood residents' preferences. Rather, the interests of all urban stakeholders, the principles of spatial justice, and the right to equitable access to urban space should be incorporated into the decision-making process.

5. Discussion and interpretation of findings

The physical access barriers currently employed in some urban neighborhoods to regulate access, although they ostensibly pursue objectives such as enhancing security, maintaining privacy, and limiting the presence of non-residents, lack the spatial and social nuances embedded in traditional Iranian urban planning practices. In the traditional urban form, access control was primarily achieved through the spatial organization of the built environment, the hierarchy of circulation routes, the gradual legibility of territorial boundaries, and the strengthening of residents' sense of belonging. Through these mechanisms, non-local users could become progressively aware of the semi-private character of more intimate spaces before entering them and could adjust their behavior accordingly.

By contrast, contemporary access barriers have replaced this gradual process of spatial and social negotiation with an explicit and mandatory physical barrier. Consequently, the exclusion of non-local users is no longer primarily the outcome of their social and spatial understanding of territorial boundaries, but rather of physical exclusion and direct restriction of access.

The installation of access barriers in the cul-de-sacs of Shiraz, despite the legal ambiguity surrounding or restrictions on the privatization of public rights-of-way, demonstrates that the governance of these spaces is shaped not only by formal regulations but also by informal governance mechanisms. Under such conditions, decisions concerning the installation, maintenance, or removal of access barriers are, in practice, shaped through interactions among residents, the municipality, law enforcement agencies, and other local actors. These interactions may, in some cases, lead to deviations in implementation from formal legal requirements and the emergence of a form of practical accommodation between urban management institutions and local demands. The research findings further support this interpretation, as residents, owing to their stronger social cohesion and greater capacity to articulate and mobilize

collective demands, appear to have greater influence over local decision-making processes.

This situation can be interpreted through the concept of local political capital. In this context, networks of social relations, local participation, the presence and influence of community leaders (Bénit-Gbaffou and Katsaura 2014), and residents' bargaining power can, even in the absence of formal institutional mechanisms, influence the implementation of urban management policies. By contrast, non-residents, despite bearing a substantial share of the access and mobility restrictions resulting from the installation of access barriers, generally lack effective mechanisms for representing their interests in local decision-making processes. Consequently, the unequal distribution of influence between these two groups can reproduce the existing situation.

From this perspective, the continued installation of access barriers should not be understood simply as a consequence of a legal vacuum. Rather, it reflects the interaction of formal regulations, informal practices, local power relations, and broader processes of urban governance. This creates a governance context in which urban management must negotiate between responding to residents' demands and safeguarding the right to equitable access and the broader public interest of all citizens.

Accordingly, the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs cannot be understood merely as a physical intervention or a traffic-management measure; rather, it represents a practical redistribution of rights of access, use, control, and decision-making authority within urban space. From this perspective, the findings of this study both corroborate and extend the existing literature on gated communities and the privatization of public space. They show that, in the context of Iranian cities, the emergence of gated environments does not necessarily take the form of formal, capital-driven development projects. Instead, it may also arise through residents' self-organized practices and within broader processes of informal urban governance.

The findings of this study also reveal a tension between the interests of residents and the broader public interests of other citizens. From residents' perspective, installing access barriers improves security and the quality of the residential environment. From the perspective of non-residents, however, such barriers reduce the permeability of the street network, restrict the right of access to public space, exacerbate spatial inequalities, and undermine the efficiency of the urban transportation network. Accordingly, the

combination of statistical significance and small-to-medium effect sizes indicates that the divergence in perceptions between the two groups is not merely a statistical difference; rather, it reflects substantive challenges related to spatial justice, the right to the city, and urban governance.

According to the Mann–Whitney U test results, the variable “attitudes toward space ownership” has the largest effect size among the examined variables and falls within the medium range ($r = 0.45$). This finding suggests that the underlying source of conflict is not simply how stakeholders assess the functional consequences of access barriers, but also how they conceptualize the boundaries of property rights and the legitimacy of exercising control over public space.

From this perspective, the findings support the “bundle of rights” framework and indicate that conflicts surrounding the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs arise primarily from competing claims over rights of access, use, control, and, particularly, exclusion rights, rather than from formal legal ownership of the space.

However, the privatization of urban roads and the installation of dedicated access barriers in Iran can be regarded as a form of informal urban development. Although such interventions may acquire some administrative or legal legitimacy through permits issued by urban management institutions, they still lack a clear status within the country's explicit and overarching legal framework and, from the perspective of formal urban planning regulations, may be regarded as legally and technically problematic. The installation of such barriers directly raises concerns regarding citizens' rights, as it restricts equitable access to public space and contributes to the increasing enclosure of the urban environment, thereby placing private interests in tension with the public interest and the principles of spatial justice.

From a moral and Islamic perspective, restricting public space also raises concerns about the broader emphasis on the equitable use of public urban facilities and the legitimacy of collective rights to the city (Moeinifar, 2024). This tension becomes particularly pronounced when access barriers are not installed in response to genuine safety or urban-planning requirements – as may be justified under passive defense measures to prevent threatening vehicles from entering sensitive areas and to protect critical facilities such as electricity, water, gas, and telecommunications infrastructure, municipal facilities, specialized hospitals, and command centers

– but rather to control territory, exclude others, and establish a form of informal ownership over public space. Under such circumstances, the boundary between the right to use and the right to occupy becomes increasingly blurred, and public spaces that should remain accessible to all gradually acquire a semi-private or privatized character. This process corresponds to what contemporary scholarship commonly describes as “urban enclosure,” a phenomenon with implications for free access, social mobility, and spatial justice.

From a legal and governance perspective, such practices also generate duality between formal rules and social practices. In the absence of clear formal and legally established mechanisms for regulating these spatial claims, residents may engage in self-organized practices to regulate spatial and social relations and secure permissions through local administrative channels. This process can, in turn, contribute to the emergence of forms of informal local governance. The result is a growing tension between the formal structure of urban management and the realities emerging at the neighborhood level, while the spatial structure of the city increasingly moves toward insularity, functional inequality, and the erosion of spatial continuity.

In this regard, the findings of the present study, consistent with Mandeli (2019), underscore the importance of proactive urban design and effective urban management in enhancing the environmental quality of public spaces and adapting them to local values and needs. The findings are also consistent with Ntakana et al. (2025) regarding the social consequences of such interventions, as the present study likewise indicates that perceptions of enhanced safety and the potential for increased property values constitute important drivers of this form of development. Accordingly, decision-making concerning the allocation, control, or restriction of access to public space requires institutional mechanisms that are both consistent with the principles of spatial justice and the public interest and capable of securing clear social legitimacy. In other words, the long-term legitimacy of urban space governance can be achieved only when decision-making is grounded in collective rights, spatial justice, transparency, and meaningful participation, rather than being driven primarily by the interests of particular groups or short-term local pressures. At the same time, the findings do not imply that all access restrictions should necessarily be eliminated. Rather, there is a need to identify and

formally recognize specific cases in which access control may be justified by demonstrable safety, planning, or management needs. Such interventions should be carefully planned and implemented on a case-by-case basis, based on clearly established needs and without compromising the city’s physical, social, and spatial structure and continuity.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study, while addressing the research questions, provide a basis for rethinking how the privatization of public space is conceptualized and how citizen action contributes to its emergence and reproduction. From a theoretical perspective, the study offers an alternative interpretation of the privatization of urban streets by connecting the literatures on the right to the city, urban enclosure, property rights, and urban governance. In contrast to studies that primarily attribute the privatization of public space to governmental policies or private-sector investment, the findings demonstrate that citizens can also play an active role in reproducing and transforming spatial relations through collective action. From this perspective, the privatization of urban space is not merely the outcome of institutional interventions; it may also emerge through the interaction among local demands, residents’ perceptions of space ownership, governance mechanisms, and public space management.

Furthermore, by introducing the conceptual framework of “enclosing public actions” and “publicizing public actions,” this study seeks to provide an analytical basis for understanding the dual role of citizen action in producing and reproducing urban space. This framework shows that public action does not necessarily strengthen the public sphere or advance the right to the city. Depending on how citizens perceive and enact their claims to urban space, such actions may either expand collective and public interests or, conversely, reinforce processes of enclosure, restrict access, and concentrate spatial benefits among particular groups. Accordingly, this conceptualization can provide a foundation for future research on the role of citizen action in urban spatial transformations and for its empirical examination across different urban contexts.

From an urban management perspective, the findings emphasize that the governance of public space is not merely a physical or legal matter, but rather a social and governance-oriented process in which the

interests and claims of different urban groups intersect and potentially conflict. Consequently, planning and policymaking concerning the use and management of public space require an approach that simultaneously addresses residents' security and well-being, the principles of spatial justice, the right to equitable access, and the preservation of the public function of urban space.

The privatization of urban cul-de-sacs and the installation of access barriers have differentiated and, in some respects, contrasting consequences for residents and non-residents. The divergence observed in the assessments demonstrates that access barriers, as a spatial and social intervention, generate heterogeneous outcomes for different groups of urban users. The findings further reinforce the relationship between physical-spatial interventions and processes of social cohesion. Accordingly, urban policymaking in this area should move beyond one-sided approaches and instead focus on managing spatial conflicts, regulating access, and developing participatory solutions that can accommodate the needs of both residents and non-residents within a more balanced framework.

For this purpose, it is necessary to establish clear, transparent criteria in urban regulations to prevent discrimination and ensure that access and use rights are governed by rules that apply equally to all citizens. Under the Municipalities Law, particularly Article 101, residential cul-de-sacs cannot, in principle, be regarded as private streets unless the right-of-way is legally incorporated into the owners' share rather than being designated as part of the municipality's share. Accordingly, addressing the privatization of residential streets and the installation of access barriers requires new planning and governance approaches developed by urban planners and urban management institutions. As a first step, a clear regulatory framework should be developed to specify the circumstances under which access barriers may be permitted or prohibited. Such a framework should explicitly consider the rights of both residents and non-residents, clarify legal responsibilities in emergencies, and establish exceptional and evidence-based criteria for interventions justified on security or traffic-management grounds.

In addition, procedures should be established to ensure that the potential access, mobility, and traffic impacts of proposed barriers are assessed before installation. Such assessments should be conducted through a standardized mechanism and submitted to

the relevant authorities as documented, evidence-based, and reasoned reports. This would provide a more transparent basis for decision-making and help ensure that access-control interventions are compatible with public interests, spatial justice, and the broader functional requirements of the urban street network.

In addition, developing participatory models for neighborhood-level alley management can serve as an effective governance measure. Given that the lack of public parking and adequate parking capacity is one of the main reasons residents support installing access barriers in cul-de-sacs, it is necessary to investigate the underlying causes of parking shortages in these areas. The excessive concentration of administrative, commercial, and medical uses may also contribute to traffic and parking pressures and, consequently, to residents' support for access restrictions. Therefore, approval of such uses near low-capacity streets should be subject to more stringent criteria or higher development charges, with the resulting revenues potentially earmarked for multi-story public parking facilities serving these areas.

Where access restrictions in residential cul-de-sacs are unavoidable for demonstrable security or urban management reasons, adopting spatial compensation and compensatory mitigation mechanisms is necessary. In practice, this could involve offsetting the reduction in public access by providing alternative routes, improving the quality and accessibility of other public spaces, and ensuring adequate access for non-residents to urban services and public transport stations. Such an approach can help accommodate residents' legitimate security concerns while preventing the exacerbation of spatial inequalities and maintaining an appropriate balance between local claims to control residential space and the broader public right to access and benefit from urban space.

In the longer term, urban management should also pursue strategies to expand and strengthen public transportation, accompanied by demand-management measures, public awareness, and, where appropriate, traffic restrictions. Such measures can reduce dependence on private automobiles and decrease the volume of private-car traffic entering and circulating within these neighborhoods. In turn, reducing automobile dependence can alleviate traffic and parking pressures that contribute to residents' support for access barriers, thereby addressing one of the underlying drivers of the privatization of residential cul-de-sacs.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed equally to this article.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

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