Pathology of the Housing Planning and Provision System for Low-Income Groups in the Metropolis of Tabriz

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ABSTRACT

Research Problem:

Housing, as one of the most fundamental human needs, plays a crucial role in determining overall quality of life. However, in recent years, rental and housing prices in some countries have risen faster than incomes, making housing increasingly inaccessible, especially for low-income groups. The issue of affordable housing shortages is even more widespread and complex in developing countries. In these nations, rapid urbanization and increasing housing demand in cities are compounded by the lack of effective and clear policies to provide housing for low-income groups. Consequently, as most migrants, young people, and urban poor reside in substandard and inadequate housing, there is a pressing need to reconsider affordable housing policies, particularly for low-income groups. If existing urban planning and management fail to address housing demand, negative consequences emerge in the spatial and physical structure of human settlements, including: Formation of informal settlements and slums, Unplanned urban sprawl, Deterioration of central urban areas, Horizontal urban expansion. These issues have significant adverse effects and are costly and difficult to control. Given rising populations, economic inequalities, increasing housing and rental prices, and the consequent importance of housing planning—especially for low-income groups—there is a need to reassess policies and planning in this area, particularly in developing countries. This study aims to analyze the housing planning and provision system for low-income groups in the metropolitan city of Tabriz and propose practical solutions. Informal settlements have been a major urban challenge in Tabriz since the 1960s, appearing as a "dark stain" on the city's fabric. Migrants in Tabriz have informally created spaces for living, working, and socializing, while those unable to integrate into the city center have resorted to living in peripheral and informal areas. By 2015, these settlements covered approximately 2,000 hectares, housing over 400,000 people, a number that grew to 468,000 by 2021 due to population growth. Key characteristics include: Overcrowding, Poor construction quality, Socio-cultural poverty, Unemployment and informal labor, Lack of educational and welfare facilities, Low literacy rates, Drug addiction and social deviance, Physical, social, and cultural disconnection from the city.

Research Question:

Given these challenges, the study addresses the following question: What are the most critical challenges and weaknesses in the planning and provision system for low-income housing in metropolitan Tabriz?

Research Method:

This applied and analytical-exploratory study first identifies challenges through documentary research, then analyzes data using researcher-made questionnaires and structural equation

modeling (SEM) in AMOS software. The statistical population includes academic experts and urban managers in Tabriz, with sample size determined via Cohen's formula at a 95% confidence level.

The Most Important Results and Conclusion:
Housing is a central issue in economic, demographic, and social studies, and failure to address it can have irreversible societal impacts. Governments, recognizing its importance, have historically intervened in housing provision through various policies. In Iran, the Constitution (Articles 2, 31, and 43) mandates the government to ensure adequate housing for all, yet housing remains a major challenge, especially for low-income groups. Key contributing factors include: Unfavorable socio-economic structures, Spatial imbalances, Dominance of traditional, technocratic approaches, Financial resources favoring high-income groups, Challenges in accessing housing loans, Lack of price controls on housing and rents, Inaccurate identification of low-income groups, Insufficient urban land and housing management. In Tabriz, additional shortcomings include: Lack of participatory and empowerment strategies, Top-down, rigid planning, Absence of financial incentives, Fragmented responsibilities among agencies, Housing financialization and price inflation, Poor oversight and uncoordinated policies. The findings align with prior studies (Tavakolinia & Zarghami, 2018; Al-Hajri, 2022; Canelas & Alves, 2024; Aftabi Chuan et al., 2022) on unfavorable housing market conditions and policy failures. This study uniquely integrates radical (political economy of space) and liberal economic discourses with local planning frameworks. To address these challenges, the following measures are recommended: Accurate identification of low-income groups, Increased government investment in low-income housing, Incentivized private sector participation through laws and subsidies, Establishment of dedicated credit funds for low-income households, Cost-reduction measures (tax subsidies, discounts, loan interest subsidies), Empowerment programs for informal settlement residents, Private investment incentives (tax exemptions, facilitations), Coordination among housing, welfare, and urban development agencies, Higher taxes on vacant properties, Government intervention in land/housing pricing to curb speculation, Inclusion of low-income needs in urban development plans, Integration of housing policies with urban planning, Unified land policies and enhanced oversight, Taxation on unused urban land, Land inventory databases to identify idle plots, Revised urban development models to increase land supply, Updated construction codes for low-income housing, Planned expansion in peripheral areas for affordable housing, Strengthened NGO roles in informal settlements, Legal support for low-income housing cooperatives. The study's findings indicate that among the factors influencing the successful planning of low-income housing in metropolitan Tabriz, the highest feasibility scores belong to the following components: Urban Development and Housing Construction (Mean: 0.56), Structural Factors (Mean: 0.39), Economic Factors (Mean: 0.33). Furthermore, structural equation modeling (SEM) results reveal that: The critical value for the urban development and housing construction variable exceeds 1.96 at a 95% confidence level, indicating statistical significance. In contrast, the economic and structural variables fall below 1.96, suggesting that these dimensions face serious challenges in Tabriz's low-income housing planning system.