

Comparative study of design disciplines to promote the identity of historic urban cores in Iran

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Abstract

Historic zones are vital components of urban structures, linking past and present within the process of morphological evolution. In Iran, many such areas have experienced significant physical and functional decline over the last century. Revitalizing them requires innovative approaches, as prevailing planning strategies tend toward extremes—either strict conservationism or aggressive interventionism. Conservationists aim to preserve historic identity, whereas interventionists priorities modernization at the cost of historical character. This study critiques Iranian urban planning regulations concerning historic urban fabrics, using a comparative approach with successful international cases from England, France, and Spain. Key challenges in Iran include fragmented management and the lack of comprehensive standards—such as colour, style, material, and proportion—to assess new urban and building designs during approval and implementation. The research follows three steps: first, employing a descriptive-analytical method alongside comparative study; second, conducting qualitative analysis through review, description, and interpretation of conservation policies in the three European countries and Iran; third, formulating an urban design guideline and strategy to safeguard the historical identity of Iranian urban fabrics. Findings highlight the necessity of revising planning and design regulations, incorporating criteria that preserve historic identity while encouraging creativity and urban vitality. This study contributes to the discourse on heritage conservation by offering insights for more effective, balanced approaches to sustaining the identity of Iran’s historic zones.

Keywords: Urban conservation; Morphological identity; Historic fabric; Planning regulation; Historic zones

1. Introduction

"Urban design is often a reflection of a city’s historical narrative" (Hosseini et al, 2024, p.70). Each city’s historic fabric is recognised as a historical heritage, and its identity is considered a valuable asset. Urban interventions in the historical fabric aim to improve the quality of life, increase vitality, and enhance the physical-spatial quality of the historical fabric. However, some architectural and planning projects are marked by extensive changes and often being incompatible with their historical context and proven not to preserve their historical and cultural values and identity.

Overall, addressing historical fabrics in urban planning has become a pivotal concern for most countries. In alignment with international standards for historical fabrics, new structures should be in harmony with their adjacent buildings while incorporating new elements aligned with emerging patterns and technologies (Worthington, 1998). Considering specifications, character, and urban landscape is crucial for their acceptance. By prioritising attention and respect for historical fabric, along with adherence to qualitative standards, urban revitalisation projects become more successful. Each part of a historic zone—no matter of its size or scale—requires a tailored type of intervention

based on its unique characteristics. The purposeful intervention and the preservation of the physical identity of historical fabrics have necessitated the examination of current interventions and their outcome assessment (Hannachi & pour Sarrajian, 2014; Masuod & Beigzadeh Shahraki, 2012).

In Iran, one of the oldest urban civilization, laws have been introduced and approved for approximately a century, and considerable material and spiritual expenses have been allocated to interventions in historical urban fabrics. These actions have sometimes aimed at preserving the foundation of ancient cities and at other times have worked towards their elimination, following various frameworks and directions (Jamalpour, 2006). Due to the lack of a clear objective and a specific theory in these interventions, and the predominant confusion in the adopted intervention policies, what is observed in practice often tells the story of a gradual destruction of these fabrics. This research seeks to formulate suitable design guidelines for interventions in historical urban fabrics and the preservation of their physical identity, by collecting perspectives, ideas, congresses, and global experiences on one hand, and highlighting the deficiencies

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and problems existing in the policies and planning of historical fabrics.

The identification of a historical building as cultural heritage, followed by its registration and listing by governments for its preservation, imposes limitations on the rights of private owners of this heritage. This research studies urban conservation regulations in Iran and compares them with three European countries, England, France, and Spain. These European countries are considered as good models and pioneers in the preservation of cultural heritage (Heydari Shooli, Jalali, 2021). They have laws and many guiding documents, conservation principles, and national policies which have constantly evolved overtime alongside with the effective administrative practices that implemented them (ibid.). Therefore, it can be said that the significance of these documents and administrative practices based on conservation principles in these countries is considerably higher than that of laws.

The main obstacles in management and planning permission procedure within historical urban fabric in Iran are: a) a lack of coherent management; b) a lack of consistency in decision-making techniques; and c) a lack of prioritization for historical fabric preservation (Mashhoudi, 2023). In order to find sustainable solutions that maintain the identity of physical urban forms in Iran's historical urban fabrics, this article aims to address these issues within the framework of existing planning regulations. The study employed a comparative and descriptive data analysis method, to examine and compare urban design guideline between European case studies and Iran. This is to find the gap in existing planning and design regulations at local and national levels in order to maintain physical identity of historic urban cores of Iranian cities.

2. Research Background: A Literature Review

"The identity of a place becomes meaningful to us through the presence of individuals. In simpler terms, the identity of a place has a close connection to the personal identity of the people in it" (Bandarabad et al., 2017, p.276). Urban identity becomes meaningful when it materializes in the physical structure of the city, serving as a symbol of the city's identity (Nofel et al., 2009). Historical fabrics of cities, despite possessing identity and heritage values, have often suffered from a lower status due to physical instability, lack of safety standards, strength, and urban infrastructure services (Kalantari Khalilabad et al., 2016).

The historical fabrics of cities encompass the primary core of urban formation and subsequent developments, representing the cultural-historical heritage of the city and society. The importance of preserving these values, along with strengthening the connection between these fabrics and the entire city, has led to the definition of urban conservation and restoration plans. The expansion of a new urban fabrics within its historical context and the

transformation of the forms and structure of its old neighbourhoods - i.e. the spread of new physical elements without establishing a suitable connection with the historical context- destroy the identity of these fabrics (Ghaderi et al., 2012).

The detrimental effects of the rapid growth of mega-cities and the threat to historical fabrics and ancient dwellings have led to an increasing focus on revitalizing old fabrics and urban conservation (Bonyadi, 2011). Over the past century, there has been a tendency to preserve and protect historical buildings, and explicit principles and guidelines have been developed. It was in the 20th century that resolutions, charters, and significant regulations regarding urban conservation were formulated and applied. Some of these resolutions were revisited in later resolutions, but the crucial point is that they have undergone an evolutionary process, gradually addressing more aspects of conservation and redevelopment of urban conservation issues (Shateri Vaighan et al., 2020).

The methods of intervention and dealing with historical fabrics are varied among different countries based on their political, economic, and socio-cultural conditions. Examining these different approaches and the results of interventions in historic and unsustainable fabrics and their impacts can serve as a useful guide in identifying effective approaches and how to implement them in urban fabrics. Moreover, understanding their challenges and problems can be an effective step in preventing costly mistakes from recurrence.

Urban conservation is a knowledge-based process involving intentional interventions in an old urban place to preserve and contemporize it. Contemporizing is a process that leads to the creation of a new urban spatial order while preserving the essential characteristics of the original urban fabric. The goal of this process is to address the issues of historic fabrics in the context of overall urban tissues, through the enhanced renewal, restoration, renovation, conservation or a set of regeneration actions. These three types of interventions encompass a wide range of activities based on conditions and needs of individual cases (Kalantari Khalilabad et al., 2016).

In successful interventions, the emphasis is on loyalty to the values and the contextual identity of a historic fabric. Conservation activities aim to utilize the existing potential and actively strengthen positive aspects while mitigating negative threats. In renewal interventions, there is greater flexibility in loyalty to the past, and depending on the case, minor changes can be incorporated. Renewal activities aim to increase efficiency, and productivity, and restore urban life to the fabric. In reconstruction interventions, there is no obligatory loyalty to the past; rather, the goal is to create new ecological and physical-environmental conditions. One universal approach dealing with historical fabrics cannot be formulated, and the intervention method applicable to each urban fabric must be considered individually (Kalantari Khalilabad et al., 2016).

3. Theoretical Framework

"The major goal of urban planning is creation of cities that provide desirable place for the social life and welfare of the citizens" (Khatibi & Haji Najafi, 2016, p.56). Contemporary theorists have developed guidelines and principles for designing in historical fabrics, emphasising sustainable development. According to Dehghan Rikabadi et al (2021), the fundamental principle in urban design interventions in historical fabrics involves respecting and preserving historical and cultural values, referencing valuable historic building elements in new structures, and presenting contemporary values. This is achieved by maintaining integrity and coherence, observing authenticity in design and materials, and considering the character of the place (ibid.).

Historical environments introduce complex influences on their surroundings, necessitating attention to scale, mass, fabric, volumetric form, and style in design (Torkzaban et al., 2011). Design solutions should consider cultural values, traditions, and existing structure conditions, varying by context (Fielden et al., 2007). New buildings should harmonise with the urban rhythm, maintain balanced mass, define street boundaries, use traditional or compatible materials, and feature high-quality craftsmanship. Significant elements in a structure are distinguished by exceptional size, unique shapes, and valuable locations, standing out due to their visual uniqueness (D. K. Ching, 2009).

The approach to intervening in historical urban fabrics and spaces has evolved over time and across different locations. Prior to industrialization, historical cities underwent transformation and renovation guided by cultural criteria and limited technical tools. However, the industrial age in the 19th century introduced new possibilities through technological advances. From then

on, historical city fabric was sometimes valued and other times considered obstructive (Jamalpour, 2006).

Notably, the 1950s focused on urban reconstruction, while the 1960s emphasized rejuvenation and social innovation (Daviran et al, 2011). The Rome Congress of 1972 aimed to modernize urban spaces while considering cultural foundations, emphasizing continuity of urban fabric use. The Budapest Declaration, also from 1972, highlighted historical collections and proposed modernization and revitalization. The World Heritage and Cultural Heritage Treaty prioritized preservation without fabric intervention. The Bologna 1975, Congress maintained a cautious renovation perspective. The Amsterdam Charter recognized unique architecture as common heritage, emphasizing cooperation and comprehensive urban design for conservation (Habibi et al., 2009).

In the 1980s, the focus shifted toward reclaiming neglected ancient urban fabrics through "Urban Redevelopment." The Dresden Declaration in 1982 emphasized reconstructing historical buildings destroyed during World War II, considering both physical and social aspects while preserving identity and structures. Rehabilitation, renovation, and reconstruction were key methods (Jamalpour, 2006; Kargar et al., 2021).

The 1990s prompted comprehensive reevaluation, with the central concept being "urban contemporizing." Urban conservation encompassed economic, physical, social, and cultural dimensions, aiming to create a new identity aligned with contemporary life while acknowledging historical roots. In the early 21st century, "urban renewal" emerged, prioritizing attraction, authenticity, and distinctiveness. Historic city centers became hubs for social movements and collective memories associated with ancient urban heritage (Habibi et al., 2009).

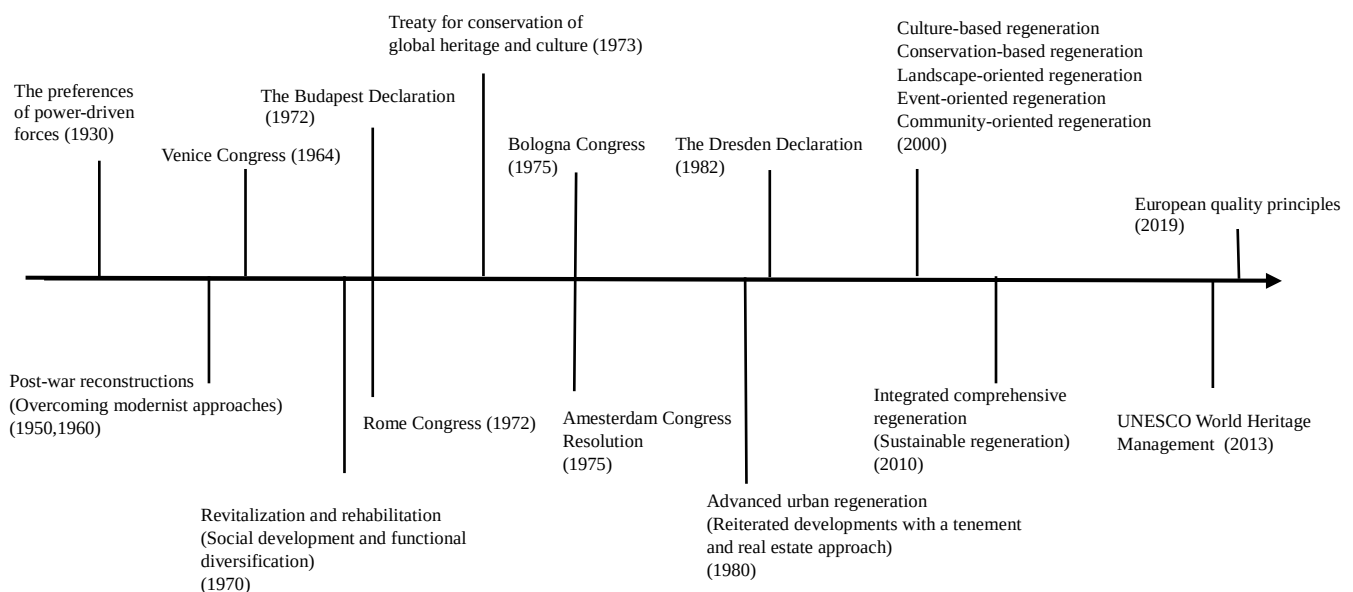


Fig. 1. The timeline shows the change in approaches towards cities' historic cores

4. Research Method

In this research, a descriptive-analytical method and a comparative study have been employed. Adopting a qualitative approach, the emphasis has been placed on data analysis and the literature review. a review of urban conservation approaches, theoretical models related to physical intervention methods in old and historical fabrics, the world urban conservation congresses, and the study of experiences of four countries (England, France, Spain and Iran) have been conducted to collect and compare required documents and data.

The data analysis method is qualitative, based on reviewing, describing, and interpreting approaches, with a focus on the experiences of three European countries and Iran in the field of conservation policies for preserving the physical identity of historical fabrics. By examining, comparing, and contrasting global and Iranian design regulations, a critique and analysis of detailed design regulations in the face of physical intervention in historical fabrics have been conducted. Ultimately, an urban design guideline, strategy, and solution have been formulated for preserving the physical identity of historical urban fabrics in Iran.

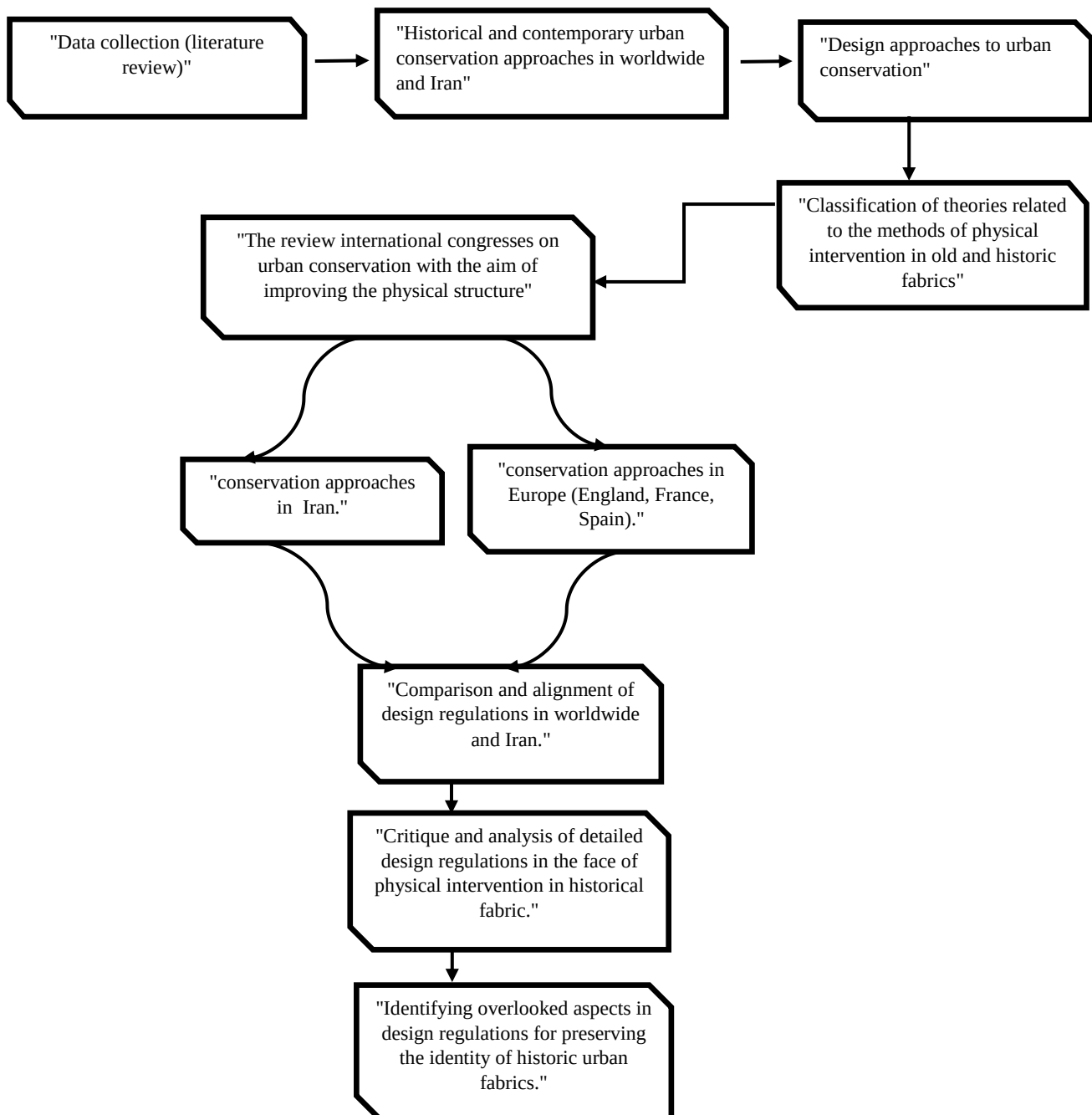


Fig. 2. Comparative study method diagram between regulations of iran and the world

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 The conservation regulations between England, France, Spain and Iran

5.1.1. England

Due to its semi-centralized political system and the pioneering nature of its planning system in urban development programs, England is considered a suitable example for comparative analysis. This is particularly relevant for understanding the shortcomings of Iran's planning system in this article. Additionally, the existence of a powerful structure of local government in engaging active and effective public participation further supports this comparison.

Listed Building refers to a structure recognized as nationally important. According to English heritage, all buildings constructed before 1700 and those built between 1700 and 1840 must be protected. This protection includes some restriction to be applied to its neighbouring buildings in its proximity too (UK government, 2018). Listing criteria include local and national interest, age and rarity, design, artistic features in plan and form, construction techniques, materials, quality, and the survival of the building (Mays, 2017; Heydari Shooli, 2021). Around 400,000 listed buildings exist in England. Listed buildings are categorized into three grades (UK government, 2018, p.4):

- "Grade 1 buildings have exceptional features, constituting only 2.5% of listed buildings.
- Grade 2* buildings are significant, and attract special attention (architecturally or historically). 8.5% of listed buildings fall into Grade 2*.
- Grade 2 buildings have special local interests that guarantee efforts for their preservation. More than 90% of all listed buildings are in this grade".

In summary, the principles for listed buildings are as physical layout, past and present ownership, and current and previous land and building uses. follows: (UK government, 1990, unpaginated)

"- If something is attached to a listed building in a way that is legally regarded as part of the land (transferred with the property upon sale unless expressly excluded), it will be protected by listing.

- Any structure attached to the listed building (even if large, including all other buildings) that, at the time of listing, has aided the principal building will be protected.
- Any building before 1948 located within the curtilage of the principal building, provided it is fixed to the land and adjacent to the principal building, will be protected.
- The removal of a building must be determined on a case-by-case basis, but essentially it is the land area that is subordinate to the principal building. Relevant factors in determining that area include
- Some buildings will not be exempt from listing.
- After June 2013, some new or revised listings may remove certain detached or attached structures from the preservation list or declare certain features not of special

interest." The words are checked to be the same as original text in the reference." British urban conservation is a bottom-up approach. The restrictions and conservation guidelines for the neighbourhood are determined by the level of local interest in its listed buildings and how they can be conserved and elevated in their context. Consequently, the context becomes as valuable as the single historic building, and each conserved neighbourhood develops its own exclusive conservation guidelines.

5.1.2. France

various types of works, regardless of their nature and age, are covered. These include prehistoric caves, archaeological sites, churches, castles, public buildings, private houses, agricultural structures, factories, recreational buildings, parks, gardens, and neighbourhoods (Riahi Moghaddam et al., 2021).

In France, criteria such as quality, aesthetics, rarity, examples of a specific style or construction method, or historical significance are considered for the selection of works, structures, and places with cultural and identity value. The law for preservation does not impose restrictions based on the type or age of the building. Consequently, Currently, approximately 40,000 buildings in France are subject to historical preservation laws. (Meijer et al, 2014). Of this number, 15,000 are classified in the list of protected works, while the remaining 25,000 are listed in the complementary list. About half of these structures are owned by the government, often belonging to local communities, and the other half are privately owned. Around 700 structures are added to the protected works list annually (ibid). Although this number may seem small compared to other countries, it should be noted that buildings under the French support system can receive government subsidies and benefit from tax exemptions. Therefore, efforts are made to control the change in conservation areas. their number (Riahi Moghaddam et al., 2021).

The responsibility for preparing a local plan or commune plan falls under the direction of the mayor. Until the year 2000, these plans were called POS (Plan d'Occupation des Sols), but later they were replaced by PLU (Plan Local d'Urbanisme). The goal of PLU is to establish a development program for the commune and general planning regulations that apply to specific locations (Meijer et al, 2014). PLU divides the commune into four zones (IFP Ltd, undated, unpaginated):

- "Zone U": Allows for new construction permits, likely in existing development areas and adjacent areas with existing infrastructure.
- "Zone AU": Future development zone, including cases where infrastructure is already available or planned.
- "Zone A": Agricultural zone where only new construction related to agriculture is allowed.

- “Zone N”: Protected areas where no new construction is allowed due to their historically, ecologically, or environmentally sensitive nature.

Planning regulation for protected areas in France is also divided in four groups (IFP Ltd, undated, unpaginated):

- “Protected Area”¹: These areas are designated in the center of the city or a specified urban area. This designation is usually accompanied by urban planning and valuation (PSMV) (Plan de sauvegarde et de mise en valeur). The determination of these areas is under the jurisdiction of the central government. They are often referred to as “Malro”. New designations are currently rare as the discussed subsequent zoning types have replaced them.

- Zone for the Protection of Architectural, Urban, and Landscape Heritage (ZPPAUP) (Zone de Protection du Patrimoine Architectural, Urbain et Paysager): These areas are related to the protected area and are determined by the local council. They are often smaller in size and are located around historical buildings or sensitive areas in rural regions.

- Areas for the Promotion of Architecture and Heritage (AVAP) (Aires de mise en Valeur de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine): Since 2010, ZPPAUP has been replaced by a new name, AVAP. Part of the reason for the name change is to give more priority to sustainable development, although many believe that these new areas have less control and financial support compared to ZPPAUP.

- Ecologically Important Natural Areas (ZNIEFF) (Zones Naturelles d'Intérêt Ecologique, Faunistique et Floristique): These areas focus more on ecology than architecture. Specific regulations also exist regarding construction along the coastline, in mountainous regions, and near forests. In each case, there are additional restrictions on development, and financial assistance may be available for the restoration of a property.”

In France, the emphasis is on preserving the neighborhood while maintaining the building historic characteristic whereas in England, the focus is on the building while conserving the neighborhood. In France, they prioritize the originality of the neighborhood, ensuring that any changes or transformations in the buildings do not harm its value. In other words, more importance is placed on the fabric of the neighborhood, while preventing any separate invasion and occupation of that fabric.

5.1.3. Spain

The Spanish Heritage Law of 1985 contains regulations for the protection of buildings and specific areas with historical, artistic, or archaeological interests. This includes rights of pre-emption, protective measures, and obligations, such as the prohibition of demolition, reimbursement of funds for reconstruction, and maintenance of buildings (Unesco, 1985). The law (1985) classifies Spain's historical heritage into three levels (Cultural Policies of Spain, undated).

- Works belonging to the first level enjoy the highest degree of protection for both movable and immovable

artifacts. They fall into the category of unique and culturally valuable artifacts at the national and international levels. The process of registering these artifacts should also be included in the public registry of artifacts.

- The second level of protection is assigned to artifacts with high importance. These artifacts must also be declared as valuable works, and their registration process should be included in the public registry of culturally significant works.

- The third level includes all artifacts belonging to the historical heritage of Spain. The names of these works are not listed in any registry, but the laws of some autonomous regions have made provisions for a type of listing to register these works.

Each autonomous community² has also declared and protected buildings and areas of regional interest by approving “regional laws”. City councils³ also define historical areas and neighbourhoods where similar restrictions are applied. The simplest way to discover them is by examining the city's general urban plan (PGOU) (Plan general de Ordenacion Urbana), where state, regional, and local restrictions for each immovable property, area, or specific building in the city are reflected (Bellet Sanfeliu, 2021). Historic buildings and listed structures are usually owned by the government, autonomous community, or municipalities. The restrictions are published by the Registry of Deeds and Properties. For buildings with specific characteristics but possessing architectural or historical value, the “Historical Property Law” and various autonomous community property laws determine the legal procedure. Other buildings do not require special permits (ibid.). Table 1 briefly provided a comparison between studies cases in Europe highlighting the similarities and differences between their policies and objectives.

¹ Secteur Sauvegardé

² Comunidad Autónoma
³ Ayuntamientos

Table 1

Objectives and Policies of Classifying the Conservation of Historical Fabric in European Countries Based on the Documents and Laws of the Countries

Country Name	Sentence Reference	Objectives	Policies	References
England	George Gilbert Scott's Articles presented in The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)	Support for ancient artifacts was integral to the efforts of individuals such as Raskin and Scott, and the goal was the preservation of national heritage for future generations.	Observing the principle of minimal intervention in the restoration of artifacts and establishing and promoting grassroots organizations and national foundations.	(Jokilehto, 2015)
	"Urban and Country Planning Law of 1947 and its guidelines	The goal was to provide local authorities with a guide for conservation by cataloging artifacts, rescuing endangered buildings post-WWII, and classifying unique architectural or historical structures.	Establishing an integrated, comprehensive, and hierarchical system for the management and preservation of artifacts with legal tools.	(Town and Country Planning Act, 1947)
France	Commission for Historical Monuments of France Document 1793	Meeting scientific, artistic, and educational objectives.	Protection of cultural heritage as national heritage and achieving priorities and common language of conservation based on assessment criteria.	(Jokilehto, 2015)
	Law of December 31, 1931, on the Protection of Historical Buildings	Support for various types of works without considering their nature and antiquity.	Financial resource management for prioritized works, considering the conservation system, for the allocation of government grants and utilization of tax exemptions.	(Historic Monument Act, 1931)
Spain	The heritage Law in Spain	Establishing a hierarchy in the conservation of historical sites with the delegation of authority to autonomous states.	Action based on a unified national policy and the preparation of executive laws at the local level.	(Spanish Historical Heritage Law, 1985)

(Source: Riahi Moghaddam et al, 2021, pp.228-229 summarized by the Authors)

From the three countries examined in this research, it can be said that the origins of the classification of structures and the conservation of historical fabrics started in France and have evolved and advanced in the United Kingdom today. The British heritage conservation system is extensive and characterized by relative flexibility. Flexibility is a hallmark of the British conservation planning system (Mohammad Moradi et al, 2017). Essentially, the classification and grading of cultural heritage are

carried out with the aim of better-managing heritage resources, improving contemporary social life, and managing financial and economic resources to prioritize the conservation of heritage (Riahi Moghaddam et al, 2021). This is based on the recognition and formulation of effective criteria and components. Various approaches to classification are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Approaches, Components, and Classification of the Conservation of Historical Fabrics in three European countries

Country/Regulation Date	Approach Classification	Criterion or influential component	Classification method
England Town and Country Planning Act, 1947	Categorization of Heritage for Conservation Guidelines: Agricultural, Recreational (Public), Educational, Governmental, Industrial, Military, Urban Houses, Traditional Houses (Rural), and Modern Architecture	Classification Based on Criteria Such as Architectural Value, Historical Significance, Antiquity and Rarity, Aesthetics, National Values, and Conservation Status [converting historic buildings and land uses to promote new opportunities in existing structures within urban fabrics.]	Grade I: Buildings with Exceptional Features Grade II*: Very Important Buildings with Significance Grade II: Buildings with Special Features
France Historic Monument Act, 1931	Centralized Management of Cultural Heritage at the National Level through the Central Government with the Approach of Empowering Municipalities, Regional Authorities, and Local Administrations	The quality of aesthetics, rarity, unique exemplification of a style or construction method, and historical significance. [Enhancing the spatial quality of city historic cores through urban renewal.]	Classified works Supplementary list
Spain Spanish Historical Heritage Law, 1985	Determining various approaches based on the goals and needs of autonomous regions at the local level, taking into account the overall national policies.	Classification based on the criteria of conservation competence and the significance of cultural heritage. [Recommendation for compact city form due to environmental effects, social divisions, economic impacts, high energy costs in construction, infrastructure costs, and public service costs in scattered construction]	Highest degree of protection Protection with high significance Other cultural heritage sites

(Source: Riahi Moghaddam et al, 2021, pp.230-231 summarized & revised by the authors shown in brackets)

5.1.4.Iran

The urban development plans defined in the urban planning system of Iran include: land-use planning, national and regional urban planning, regional development and infrastructure plans, urban complex plans, comprehensive city plans, detailed plans, guiding plans, plans for new cities, and plans for neighbourhoods (Feizi Najafi et al, 2012). These plans were designed to make effective use of the land and the proper and efficient spatial discipline (Farahnaki & Barakpur, 2019). In the urban planning system of Iran, the only place where attention has been paid to urban design issues is a resolution approved by the Supreme Council of Urban Planning on 16/12/2008 concerning proposed plans for "Regulations and Rules of Urban Facade and Walls Cleanup," "Pedestrianization of Urban Streets," and "Regulations and Organization of Urban Landscape" (Keshani Hamedani, 2022, p.76). This indicates that the role of urban design in the urban planning system of Iran is very limited and faint. The lack of attention to qualitative dimensions in existing laws leads to a lack of necessary support for the feasibility of urban design projects (Feizi Najafi et al, 2012).

Urban zones in Iran's context are specific areas on urban planning maps that indicate the permissible land use and activities for each land parcel. They also specify the regulations governing construction in each zone. The regulations and rules for land use in urban subzones are as follows: (Tehran Municipality, 2012, pp.9-11 & 15)

- "The setback of building masses and setbacks on the ground floor, by freeing up space for pedestrian traffic, gathering, and lingering in the axes of the activities of

subzones (S1) and (S2), is mandatory to be a minimum of 3 meters. It is evident that the space resulting from the setback of building masses is owned by the property owner and is not considered part of density and occupancy. However, the owner is obligated to facilitate public use of these spaces."

Note: In cases where setbacks and recesses are technically infeasible for architectural reasons, as determined by the regional architectural council, obtaining a permit without setbacks is permissible (ibid, pp.9).

"The construction of an incentive floor with a corresponding density is permitted in plots with an area of three times more than the minimum plot size, to prevent the fragmentation of lands and properties in all (S1) and (S2) activity subzones. Two incentive floors with corresponding density are allowed in plots with an area five times more than the minimum plot size. For cases where the number of floors is 12 or more, it is subject to the preparation and submission of a justification plan to the Article Five Commission (AFC) for planning permission approval. (see table 3 for details)

During the detailed plan review process, the Tehran Municipality is required to determine, within one year, the share and organization of low and moderate functional roles and uses in subzones S1 and S2.

For all plots up to 1000 square meters in area within subzones M221 and M222 with special plans, if the plot owner applies for a residential, commercial, or office permit, the issuance of a permit with a maximum density of 100%, maximum occupancy area of 50%, and a limit of 2 floors above the pilot or basement is allowed."

Table 3
Land Use and Construction Regulations in Residential Subzone (R), Activity Subzone (S), and Mixed Subzone (M) in the Detailed Plan of Tehran City

Minimum occupancy coefficient	Minimum width of the adjacent passage	Minimum width of the alley	Minimum lot size	Maximum floor area	Maximum number of floors	Maximum allowable building density	General characteristics of the subzone	Three-digit code	areas	Two-digit code	main zone	One-digit code
-	-	-	-	50%	2	100%	Historically valuable residential	R221	Historically valuable residential fabric	R22	Special residential	R2
	-	-	-	Stabilizing the current pattern (traditional structure) until the preparation and approval of special intervention plans			Bazaar of Tehran	S111	Market (Commercial, Services, and Cultural)	S11	Commercial, Administrative, and Services	S1
40%	-	-	-	Maintaining the current situation until the preparation and approval of special plans			Mixed-use with emphasis on tourism and pilgrimage	M221	Mixed-use special	M22	Cultural and tourism with minimum residential	M2
40%	-	-	-				Mixed Historical-Cultural Fabric (Axes and Extents)	M222				

(Source: Tehran Municipality, 2012, p.7&12&16 summarized by the Authors)

5.2. Critique and Analysis of Master Planning Regulations for Conservation Areas in Iran

The comparative analysis of planning regulations in three European case studies reveals that conservation regulations are not limited to individual historic buildings. All relevant laws are employed to enhance the integrity of conservation areas as a whole. In these countries, the entirety of the fabric must be protected in a cohesive and continuous structural manner, prohibiting any large-scale interventions that may lead to disruption and destruction of the original identity and spatial structure of their historic fabrics.

However, in the case of master plans of Iranian cities, there has not been enough attention to preservation of the fabrics in which the historic buildings are listed. Some weaknesses in urban planning and design regulations in master plan of cities in Iran include:

- Lack of accurate recognition, inventorying, and classification of historical elements and their prioritization for protection.
- Absence of unified management, consistency in decision-making processes.
- Lack of attention to the historical fabrics of cities, focusing only on individual historical structures.
- Lack of standardization for preservation of listed buildings, the detailed guidelines, and the comprehensive documentations.
- Neglect of qualitative aspects such as colour, style, material, etc. in the content of master plans and during the process of their implementation.

- Lack of feasibility study and no back-up fundings to secure the future of conserved areas.
- Lack of periodic review of master plans and outdated planning laws and regulations.
- Absence of public consultation and citizens' participation in decision-making process.
- Reliance on redevelopment-based approaches, imposing serious threats to the identity of historical urban fabrics.
- Lack of evaluation to weight the degree of protection required for each historic building and the zones in which the restrictions are applied.

One of the perennial issues in the policies, laws, and guidelines of European countries is a precise understanding of the conservation areas, followed by listing and classification. Some key challenges in preserving historical fabrics in Iran include the lack of unified management, consistency in decision-making, and prioritization for protection. Standardization of comprehensive building lists and detailed lists can effectively determine future steps and prioritize the protection of historical heritage. All countries impose maximum restrictions in historical areas and historical buildings, and minimum restrictions in public spaces and green areas. Any intervention in historical zones should be coordinated by the responsible local authorities or organizations. As table 4 shows, the authorities responsible for urban and building conservation are varied in studied countries.

Table 4
Responsible local for the Conservation of Historical Monuments and Historical Fabrics in Different Countries

Country Name	Conservation Method	Name of Responsible Organisation
England	The Focus is on building listing and grading then the historic zoning	The English Heritage and Local City Councils
France	and the focus is on Zoning (Local Authorities (Commons Plans divided in four levels of restrictions	Neighbourhood Authorities (Local (Municipalities
Spain	Federative and State base decision making process with hierarchical three classification levels followed by local restrictions exclusively defined by each state	State Organization for Registration of Deeds and Properties
Iran	Listing building with the historic values and planning restrictions on individual buildings with some limitations applied to only the neighbouring buildings next to each one	Listing by Iran Heritage Organisation and Restrictions defined by Central Municipality of Tehran

In most successful urban systems, organized and comprehensive documents are needed to guide the qualitative aspects of architecture and urban planning. Without a scientific mechanism for directing and controlling the quality of construction and urban development, achieving a distinct architectural and urban identity would be challenging. The studies of conservation approaches in the European case studies revealed that “the comprehensiveness of the documents’ content”, “participation from decision-making to execution”, “the degree of attention to qualitative aspects in the content of plans and their implementations”, “legal status in line with the socio-political structure”, “periodic achievability” and “review of urban laws” are among the most critical indicators of a successful urban identity conservation).

In the case of Iran, the only crucial policy document in urban design and planning was approved in December 2008 and called “the promotion of urban identity and urban landscape quality” (abuie, Jafari Qavamabadi, 2014). However, this regulation did not have enough attention to the qualitative design dimensions which are usually known as the concern of the field of urban design such as integration of colour schemes, styles, materials, etc. There are also challenges that have not been comprehensively addressed during decision-making, implementation processes in Iran. The lack of flexibility, feedback analysis, ground data updating, various complementary urban design projects at different design scales, decision-making framework are absent in planning and design system in Iran. Without monitoring the qualitative criteria in any type of physical urban intervention, a sense of city identity cannot be achieved. Interventions in zones and deteriorated structures should prioritise conservation, rehabilitation, and redevelopment,

respectively. This means that if conservation and rehabilitation are feasible, redevelopment should be prohibited. Any development or construction activity within a historical fabric must be carried out with extreme caution and consideration for its historic structure, including its form, grain, setbacks, etc.

The protection of all registered and valuable buildings, as well as those that will be registered in the future, and observing the sanctuary of registered collections, should be mandatory. In Iran, any intervention only up to eight meters in the vicinity of registered buildings is prohibited. Furthermore, such restrictions are only applied to the density (height) of proposed plans next to a historic building, and any other criteria such as material, style, colour, or other structural entities are free of any limit.

The experiences of interventions in conservation areas in Iran showcase that rapid developments have caused numerous damages to historical urban fabrics and deteriorated their values and spatial identities. Therefore, current development-oriented approach toward regenerations of historic cores in Iran has not met all principles and criteria required for a comprehensive and effective urban conservation. Despite the goals of heritage laws governing many conservation programs, the rate of destruction in historic urban areas far exceeds the pace of preservation in these areas.

In Iran, the role of public participation in the decision-making process has been also overlooked or is very weak. In many urban design projects, the impact of people's opinions and residents of historic areas has not been taken into account. Moreover, conservation guidelines in Iran are national, while in three European studied cases, regulations are tailored at local neighbourhood scales. A summary of guidelines implemented in various countries is provided in the table 5:

Table 5
Design Guidelines of various countries in terms of historical urban fabric

Design Guideline	Country
- Utilizing existing urban lands and their development - Introducing priorities for revitalization and controlling urban growth in various directions - Creating a rational structure for the connection between historical fabric and modern fabric - Constructing new buildings with the appearance and style of old fabrics - Preparing a special program for areas in need of revitalization and reconstruction to preserve the architectural value of the city - Recommendation for compact city form due to environmental effects, social divisions, economic impacts, high energy costs in construction, infrastructure costs, and public service costs in scattered construction.	Spain
- Creating more coordination between urban issues and defining projects - Improving the quality of the city's public spaces - Protecting historical heritage and urban architecture - Transforming the city into a better place for children - Valuing the urban landscape and cultural heritage - Identifying perspectives and viewpoints of the city - Identifying heterogeneous urban fabrics - Preserving the view of important symbolic elements, including historical buildings - Reinterpreting structural elements of the city such as streets and green spaces - Organizing and appropriately distributing public spaces in the city - Revitalizing the city through the revitalization of the historical fabric - Enhancing the quality and renovating the urban fabric - Reusing urban spaces and boldly changing the physical composition while preserving heritage	France

- The classification of architectural heritage based on a combination of influential factors such as functional features, ownership, environmental placement, values, etc., is done to assess their quality and importance. - Additionally, reusing architectural and urban heritage involves identifying opportunities to repurpose existing structures and city elements.	England
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One of the most significant challenges in all countries involves the constraints set in the protected zones near listed buildings. For instance, England, as compared to other European countries, has more defined principles and guidelines for listing and classifying structures and preserving historical fabrics. It serves as a good conservation model for other two studied European countries. Nevertheless, each has also developed its own independent and advanced policies.

Table 6
 Unesco guidelines for the Registration and Preservation of World Heritage

Year	The Name of the Agreement	Design Guide	References
1962	Recommendation Letter for the Preservation and Protection of the Beauty and Features of Views and Surroundings	- Observing the principles of aesthetic recognition in a way that coordinating with surrounding structures, does not imitate traditional forms. - Preserving beautiful landscapes.	Shah Teimouri et al, 2012 Pourbahador et al. 2018
1964	International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites - The Venice Charter	- The preservation of the existing relationships between mass and colour - Avoidance of damage to the outstanding parts of historical buildings, traditional spaces, the balance of elements, and their relationship with the surrounding environment, when integrating with historical structures.	
1968	Recommendation for the protection of cultural assets that are at risk from public and private activities	- Implementation of oversight on the type and design of new structures, within the framework of regulations - Preservation of the surrounding environment of historical neighbourhoods - Preservation of historical spaces and the status of historical neighbourhoods	
1972	Recommendation for the national conservation of cultural and natural heritage	Non-interference with the relationship between the volume and color of cultural heritage and its surrounding environment.	
1976	Recommendations on the contemporary role and protection of historic areas	- Preservation of the authenticity of historical buildings by avoiding unnecessary annexations. - Preservation of features, views, and landscapes of historical sites. - Harmonious and coordinated integration.	
2005	World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture: Management of Historic Natural-Urban Landscape	- Avoiding the use of pseudo-historical designs. - Cultural continuity through qualitative interventions.	
2011	Recommendation for Historic Urban Landscape	- Creating sustainable development through a historical urban landscape approach. - The importance of tangible and intangible elements in the historical urban landscape.	

Table 7
 Design Guidelines, Strategies, and Presented Solutions for Iran Based on a Comparison with European Countries Toward Preserving the Identity of Historical Urban Fabrics

Solution	Strategy	Design Guide	Index	component	
Anticipation of Mixed Uses that Promote Greater Sustainability of the Fabric and the Preservation of its Architectural and Historical-Cultural Values Reconstruction of Sections or Elements of the Valuable Architectural and Urban	Preservation of Patterning, Color, and Texture of Materials in the Historical Area Preservation of Topography and Natural Factors Preservation of the Configuration and Relationships of Components in the Limited Area Prohibition of Constructing Large-Scale Buildings and Complexes in the	Preservation and Revitalization of the Historical Identity of the City Preservation and Introduction of Monuments and Evidences Related to Urban	Green Spaces, Vegetation Cover, Landforms (Mountains, Hills, Valleys), Waters (Rivers, Lakes, Coastline.	Natural	Physical Elements

Components Such as the Market, Historical Squares, Main Passages, and Neighbourhood Centers, Whose Loss Endangers the Legibility and Identity of the Fabric. Anticipation of How to Utilize the Principles and Values of the Architectural Fabric of the Historic Area in New City Sections to Strengthen Natural and Artificial Perspectives. Use of Indigenous Materials in the Historic Area. Providing Financial Incentives, Including Subsidies, Facilities, Exemptions, and Forgiveness, Proportionate to the Criteria and Requirements of Preservation. Giving Priority to the Private Sector in Actions, with the Requirements and Standards of Historic Fabric Preservation.	Historical Area Preservation of Symbols and Signs of the Historical Area Consistency of the New Building Patterns with the Original Types in the Historical Area Elimination of Additions and Damaging Buildings Disturbing the Appearance of the Historical Area Identification and Preservation of Urban Divisions in the Historical Area (from Small to Large Scale) Removal of Buildings and Installations Causing Disturbance and Disruption to the Natural Landscape, the View of Historical Monuments, and the Skyline of the Area Designing an Appropriate Urban Plan Based on Citizen Participation Avoidance of Threatening Actions to the Physical Existence of the Historical Area Use of Art in Urban Design within the Historical Fabric Protection of the City's Architectural Heritage through the Regeneration of Historical Building	Archaeology Preservation and Revitalization of the Historical Identity of the City Preservation and Introduction of Monuments and Evidences Related to Urban Archaeology (Historical Urban Background) Preservation and Revitalization of Spatial-Cultural Values and Other Symbolic Features of the Historical Area Preservation of the General Morphology and Structure of the Historical Area Creation of Diverse and Attractive Urban Spaces Preservation and Improvement of Cultural, Historical, and Natural Resources Establishment of a Strong Identity Enhancement of the Quality of Research and Executive Measures in the Field of Preservation, Revitalization, and Conservation	Public, Semi-Public, and Residential Buildings, Institutions and Organizations, Fountains, Urban Furniture, Symbols, Signs, and Statues, Building Facade (Materials, Colors, Building Forms, Facade Decorations), Skyline, Enclosure and Proportions of Spaces, Spatial Geometry, Pavements, Street Arts (Murals, Urban Advertising, Billboards), Historic Monuments and Buildings with Historical and Cultural Value. Commercial Complexes and Recreational Spaces, Shopping Centers.	Buildings	
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The following table presents a comparative analysis of urban design regulations in Iran and the three studied countries (England, France, and Spain) concerning the preservation of the identity of historical urban fabrics. Planning regulations in Iran only include zoning areas under conservation and only concern protecting historic buildings that are listed and applying height restrictions to neighbouring plots. The other criteria, such as material, colour, and style controls, are ignored. The most significant difference is that local and regional authorities in Iran encourage developers and investors to regenerate conservation areas through redevelopment-based intervention methods, whereas protection and renovation are more commonly accepted approaches in the European countries studied.

Table 8

Comparative Analysis of Urban Design Regulations in Iran and the World for Preserving the Identity of Historical Urban Fabrics

The list of measures taken to preserve historical fabrics	Countries under study (England, France, Spain).	Iran
Zoning and regionalization	•	•
Precise recognition of works, listing, and classification.	•	○
Integrated management and consistency in decision-making processes.	•	○
Prioritization for the conservation of historical fabric.	•	○
Standardization of a comprehensive list of buildings, detailed plans, and maturity of documents.	•	○
Consideration of qualitative dimensions (color, style, material, etc.) in the content of designs and their implementation.	•	Observance of Vertical Pattern (Attention to Height) Resolution of Regulations and Rules for Improving the Quality of Appearance and Urban Landscape
Feasibility, periodic review, and regular updating of urban regulations.	•	○
Citizen participation from decision-making to implementation	•	○
Emphasis on development-based approaches	○	•
Weighting the protected zones and monuments	•	◇
Laws and Design Guidelines	Neighbourhood-Centric	National
• Implementation of Actions ○ Lack of Implementation of Actions ◇ Weakness in the Implementation of Actions		

6. Conclusion

The conservation of historical urban fabrics and the revitalization of urban conservation within valuable historical areas contribute to the articulation of identity for communities. Revitalization and conservation can encompass a city's identity system through cultural, social, economic, and political approaches. Interventions in historical urban fabrics have extensive repercussions on various physical, economic, and social dimensions. Large scale urban interventions in historical fabrics aim to enhance spatial quality and viability through catalytic projects with significant initiatives and conceptual frameworks. However, in practice, the implementation of widespread changes often results in inefficiencies and lower environmental quality than expected. This is mainly because they don't usually adhere to the principle harmonizing new designs with its historical and cultural values of their context. In other words, such projects can act in the direction of improving the physical identity of historical fabrics only if achieve harmony with their existing systems adhering to principles and criteria such as unity and coherence in materials, styles, etc.

The paper reviewed the guidelines and conservation standards of three European countries (England, France and Spain) which achieved relatively more successful conservation models for their historical fabrics. Having

compared them with planning approach towards historical fabric in Iran revealed number of weaknesses such as a) the lack of integrated management in decision-making, b) prioritizing redevelopment over urban restoration and renovation, c) absence of comprehensive standards for listing historic buildings, d) lack or poor attentions to details and qualitative dimensions such as the use of appropriate colour, style and material of new designs disregarding its context, e) failure to achieve feasibility and periodic review, and finally f) the lack of public consultation or participation in decision-making processes. Such a negligence to these fundamental criteria has imposed serious damages to the physical identity of historical urban fabrics in Iran.

The zoning model applied to Iran's planning regulations mainly emphasises on restoration and protection of individual historical buildings and did not have enough attention to the historic context around them. There are only four zones identified in master plans of cities of Iran which are residential, commercial, mixed and green zones, but not any designated historic zones. Comparison made in this paper with three major European cities provides us with alternative solutions to overcome the problems in conservation of historic fabrics in Iran. The paper addressed physical vulnerabilities of historic fabrics and the challenges planners and decision makers have to preserve the physical identity of historic city cores. In

summary, the approach of European countries in protecting historical structures has been found more effective than Iran's conservation model. Therefore, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts of Iran are required to make a comprehensive revision to its planning approach towards what should be called historic zones. The paper has made a small contribution to this goal by reviewing and comparing different conservation models which achieved relatively more success in preserving urban physical identity of their historic fabrics. Further research is required to be carried out in order to localise such models to adapt the cultural and social context of historic fabrics in Iran.

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