

Modeling the impact of conflict of interest between power and public interest on land use changes with emphasis on the approvals of the Article Five Commission of Tehran City

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Extended Abstract

Introduction:

Land is a fundamental element of human activity, with its location and characteristics dictating the intensity and type of use. The dynamic nature of human needs drives continuous changes in land use, reflecting shifts in societal demands and economic priorities. In urban contexts, land use decisions are shaped by a complex interplay of natural, economic, and social dimensions. The economic dimension, in particular, plays a pivotal role, as economic entities compete for optimal locations, increasing land value and impacting adjacent areas. However, this competition often prioritizes the interests of powerful stakeholders over public interest, creating tensions that destabilize urban systems. In Tehran, the Article Five Commission serves as a key regulatory body, tasked with approving land use changes and balancing these competing interests. This study investigates how conflicts between power and public interest influence land use changes in Tehran, focusing on the Commission's role in mediating these dynamics. By employing a systemic and cyclical approach, the research aims to propose a model that enhances sustainable urban development while addressing these conflicts.

Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in the political economy of space, which examines how power dynamics shape urban development. Historically, urban planning has been influenced by power structures, from ancient cities designed for military and governance purposes to modern cities shaped by economic and political ideologies. The concept of public interest, as articulated by

scholars like John Rawls, emphasizes equitable distribution of resources and opportunities within society. In urban planning, this translates to ensuring that land use decisions prioritize the collective good over individual or elite interests. The Article Five Commission, as a key decision-making body in Tehran, navigates these tensions by approving land use changes, density regulations, and development projects. However, its decisions often reflect the influence of powerful stakeholders, leading to outcomes that may undermine public interest, such as spatial segregation and environmental degradation. This study integrates theories of urban governance, social justice, and sustainable development to frame the analysis of land use changes in Tehran.

Methodology:

The research adopts a fundamental approach, aiming to elucidate the relationships between power, public interest, and land use changes. It employs a post-positivist methodology, specifically the backcasting method, to develop an optimized model for land use planning. The methodology is structured in three phases:

1. Backcasting: This phase involves constructing a theoretical model based on existing literature and empirical data on land use changes. The model identifies key indicators, such as population growth, spatial structure, and social dynamics, to assess the impact of power-public interest conflicts.
2. Questionnaire: A survey is conducted to evaluate the theoretical model, focusing on three scenarios: dominance of power interests, balance between power and public interests, and dominance of public interest. The survey assesses the sustainability of land use decisions using correlation coefficients and sustainable development metrics.
3. Interviews: Qualitative interviews with stakeholders provide insights into the practical implications of the model, comparing the Article Five Commission's processes with Western urban planning frameworks. This phase refines the model by incorporating real-world feedback and identifying context-specific challenges.

The research combines descriptive-analytical and evaluative approaches, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of land use dynamics in Tehran. The final model is designed to be adaptive, allowing for continuous revision to align with sustainable development principles.

Findings:

The study reveals that land use changes in Tehran are heavily influenced by economic interests, with powerful stakeholders often securing favorable locations at the expense of public interest. The Article Five Commission's approvals reflect this dynamic, with decisions frequently prioritizing economic gains over social and environmental considerations. For instance, conversions of green spaces to residential or commercial uses are common, often justified by agreements that

allocate portions of the land to municipal authorities. The analysis of building permits from 2001 to 2023 indicates a persistent increase in construction density and population growth, driven by relaxed regulations post the adoption of Tehran's Strategic-Structural Plan in 2007. Despite a reduction in the number of Commission approvals after the plan's implementation, the lack of transparency in decision-making processes and reliance on informal agreements undermine public interest. The proposed model emphasizes a cyclical, participatory approach to land use planning, integrating stakeholder input and sustainable development indicators to balance power and public interests.

Discussion and Conclusion:

The findings highlight the need for a systemic approach to land use planning that prioritizes sustainability and public interest. The dominance of power interests in Tehran's land use decisions has led to spatial inequalities, environmental degradation, and social challenges, such as population segregation. The Article Five Commission's role as a mediator is critical, yet its processes often lack transparency and accountability. The proposed model advocates for a dynamic, participatory framework that incorporates regular evaluations, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with sustainable development goals. By addressing the root causes of power-public interest conflicts, the model aims to stabilize land use changes and promote equitable urban development. The study concludes that while economic interests are integral to urban growth, prioritizing public interest through transparent and inclusive planning processes is essential for achieving sustainable urban development in Tehran.

Keywords: Land use change, power interests, public interest, sustainable development, Article Five Commission

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