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Renewal strategies and neighborhood participation on urban blight

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Abstract

Urban blight had its own rational and hierarchical function in the past. Nowadays it is featured with structural and functional shortage. Therefore, it has lost the capacity to meet the residents' needs. Along with intensification of urban blight problems in cities, and downtowns in particular, which affects different aspects of urban life, many urban planners have shown special attention to such districts. Laleh-Zar neighborhood is an example of these neighborhoods, which on the one hand due to lack of urban equipment and infrastructures gives rise to urban blight and penetration of commercial and trans-regional land use in residential area. On the other hand, much of its residential units are transformed into business units, warehouses, workhouse particularly on the edge of the neighborhood. Given the expansion and intensity of problems, apparently, the most effective strategy to deal with the shortcomings and the problems is participation strategy. Besides, this study has used a strategic approach, which is one of the public planning for both internal and external analyses. Therefore, it is a systematic approach, which can be helpful in decision making. The results showed that the capacity for participation of the study population was below proper level concerning the four aspects of financial, intellectual, instrumental, and physical aspects, although their tendency to participate was high. Moreover, correlation between participation capacity and intention for participation in renewing the structures had a significant relation with cultural and historical values at a confidence level of 99%.

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Keywords: Urban blight; Renewal; Neighborhood participation; Tehran

1. Introduction

There was strongly specific dynamism between old urban textures and residential structures in the past. But, based on sudden changes associated to rapid urbanism, their central role has been lost and there is no capability

of adaption with change in land use and supporting their daily life (Ahmed and Bramley, 2015; Shatu et al., 2014; Weaver, 2013).

Shlay and Whitman (2006) note that blight is a subjective idea in the thoughts of local stakeholders, and it is just a reflection of larger, more complex structural societal problems. Lack of responsive management to harmonize the neighborhoods with fast structural and functional changes of modernism has degraded compatibility of such districts to support new demands (Brueckner and Helsley, 2011; Salvati and Carlucci, 2014). Eventually, native

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residents leave the neighborhood. As a result, the unoccupied areas become the first option for immigrants and low-revenue class of people who look for the cheapest part of the city to live in. Therefore, poor socioeconomic and cultural conditions of new inhabitants, and lack of initial facilities and infrastructures which must be provided by urban managers, accelerate blighting (Habibi and Maghsoudi, 2010).

Urban distressed areas and blighted textures have always been one of the major concerns of urban management in large cities (Weaver and Bagchi-Sen, 2013). In many cases, living in such districts is connected with depression, disorder, anarchical issues, and poor social participation. Thus, one of the priorities of the modern cities and urbanization is ordering the urban blight (Galdini, 2005; Maier, 2001). In the last two decades, these issues have been noticed considerably by urban planners and managers. However, the insignificant role of civilians in preparation, implementation, and supervision of such plans tackles complete realization of the goals. Other issues are the extent of people's participation in planning and preparation of participation plan (Fagence, 2014; McDonald et al., 2009). This also has to do due to the resident's skills and abilities for taking part in decision making relating to blight's problems and issues. Urban official's management and social norms in people's daily life might influence how residents take part in public affairs (Güzey, 2009; Levy, 2015; Sandercock, 1975). On the other hand, if resident participate actively in designing and generalizing this process, the Implementation of these plans would increase.

The central area of a city is the focal point of it where main urban activities take place, common memory is developed and urban life emerges (Pacione, 2009). The central area is the most accessible location that draws workers with various skills from all directions and provides the best access to metropolitan wide markets (Alonso, 1964). Throughout the history, this part of city has taken different meaning and concepts ranging from political and economic roles to social, cultural, and physical-spatial roles (Knox and McCarthy, 2012). However, with its substantial cultural weight, the only thing that never changed was the central area of the city that never lost its historical, cultural, artistic, and urbanized role (Hall and Barrett, 2012; Hanzl, 2007). However, its urban experiences are blighted these days. Planning the neighborhoods using participation strategy is one of the main ways to avoid destruction as people are enabled by such strategies to take part in deciding about the policies and the plans that affect their lives (Andrea and Tim, 2010).

Lexically and semantically, the term “participation” refers to the involvement and gathering for a specific reason; in essence, it is about involvement, working and affecting. By acknowledging the essence, experts of management have defined participation as: the mental and emotional involvement of individuals in group-based situations in order to cooperate with each other for achieving group

goals and sharing the responsibility (Mahdavienejad and Amini, 2011; Maier, 2001).

The common models of development, thus far, have failed to create the sense of collectivism. According to vast majority of experts, the current urban development models are against development of places where people may develop real connection and relationships with each other (Evans, 2002). Also it can be noticed for the spaces where people find a chance to become familiar with others, taking part in urban problems and accepting responsibilities for the health and the environment affairs of the city (Janse and Konijnendijk, 2007). Based on this framework, a sustainable city can provide a viewpoint and lots of optimistic and hopeful situations which can introduce new policies about effective factors on urban life's quality and illustrate how all peoples and groups can take part in a decision making process (Poplin, 2012). Some urban management experts strongly believe that it will be better if some parts of urban management and planning affairs and plans are assigned to people (Moser, 1989).

Urban management is better off in recognizing social shortcoming and issues of the city and aims at improving, and developing the city (Wu et al., 2010). This by itself, brings in achievements in planning, implementing, and enabling neighborhoods (Edling and Rydgren, 2012) that can cover a large number of factors such as observation of regulations, democratic authority, easy financing, strengthening, resource coordination and having access to more resources, better decision making, professional training, responsible environment, realization of the public needs, and permanent development (Day, 1997).

Laleh-Zar neighborhood is in fact one of the central and old parts of Tehran city, which was once the cultural center of the city. The old buildings show that the neighborhood has turned into blight. It suffers from inadequate facilities, and lack of efficient service and urban equipment can be observed widely. In addition, development of business and trans-regional use of the land have changed many building along the streets into commercial units, warehouses, and dormitories of workers. One of the main problems of this area is incompatibility of the historical surrounding parts with modern life, which has forced many to leave the area. Other problems are physical land use, Insufficient capacity of crossings, which challenge the provision of urban services, poor condition of urban facilities such as green spaces and parking lots, lack of control over constructions and abandoned architecturally and culturally valuable buildings.

This introduction points out the necessity of an accurate and analytical study in the neighborhood, as well as preparing intervention plans as the specification of the case call. This is where the starting point and the approach taken for dealing with the urban blight come into consideration. Studies, planning, and implementation for gathering accurate and real data, faster implementation, lower liquid and capital costs, higher confidence level commensurate with ordering program in the districts and responsiveness,

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