



Original Article

Foresight of Community-Based Regeneration in Historic Urban Fabrics with Rural Origins: A Case Study of Sofla Neighborhood, Isfahan, Iran

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Abstract

Purpose- In recent years, community-based regeneration has gained attention because of its emphasis on participation and local governance. However, uncertainty about future development paths makes planning interventions more complex. Therefore, this study explores the future of community-based urban regeneration in the historic Sofla neighborhood of Isfahan by identifying key driving forces and possible scenarios.

Design/methodology/approach- This research is applied in purpose and follows a descriptive-analytical design using a mixed approach. First, key variables affecting community-based urban regeneration were extracted through literature review and document analysis. Next, a cross-impact matrix questionnaire was completed by 15 experts in urban planning and regeneration selected through purposive sampling. Relationships among variables were analyzed using structural analysis to determine influence and dependence levels. Finally, key drivers were used in scenario analysis to identify consistent future scenarios.

Findings- The analysis revealed that "Integrated Urban Management" acts as the primary key driver, while four leverage variables—"Formalization of Local Development Office," "Preparation and Implementation of Regeneration Program," "Stakeholder Identification and Local Needs Assessment," and "Formation of Community-Based Organizations"—function as critical dual-aspect variables with the highest capacity to transform the system. Subsequently, the dual-aspect variables were entered into scenario planning analysis, yielding two consistent scenarios. The results indicate that a desirable future for regeneration relies on strengthening institutional structures, enhancing real participation, and fostering synergy between urban management and the local community.

Research limitations/implications- The primary limitations of this study include the scarcity of specialized experts in this specific field, the lack of local community-based knowledge, and the ongoing dominance of a purely physical perspective in urban planning. To counter these challenges, future strategies must prioritize raising awareness and educating local communities about participatory approaches. Furthermore, shifting the planning paradigm from a traditional physical focus toward an integrated social and institutional framework is essential for meaningful urban regeneration.

Originality/Value- This study provides significant value by integrating structural cross-impact matrices with scenario analysis specifically within the historic context of Isfahan's Sofla neighborhood. Its originality lies in shifting the regeneration paradigm from standard physical interventions toward a dynamic, future-oriented model of participatory governance. Ultimately, it offers urban planners actionable empirical tools to navigate uncertainties and support informed decision-making in historic preservation.

Keywords- Foresight, Community-Based Regeneration, Historic Fabrics, Rural Origins, Isfahan.

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1. Introduction

It has in the past been seen not only as a place where people live but also as a setting in which a collective identity, social interactions, and the historical memory of communities are developed. Yet, in recent decades rapid economic, social, and spatial changes have modified the structure of many cities and have led to the development of spatial and social inequalities. The growth of the urban population, the fact that economic activities are concentrated in cities, and unbalanced spatial development have resulted in the creation and expansion of areas which suffer from a great many physical, social, and economic problems. Such areas, which are known in the literature on urban planning as *inefficient or dysfunctional urban fabrics*, often have to deal with problems including urban poverty, insufficient services and infrastructure, weak social capital, and a declining quality of the living environment (Cherunya et al., 2020; Ghaedi et al., 2025).

On a global scale, the fact that urbanization is increasing has led to a large number of people in urban areas. It is expected that by the middle of the twenty-first century about 70% of the world's population will be living in urban areas, most of the growth in this regard taking place in developing countries (Parikh et al., 2020; Wainaina et al., 2022).

In Iran many cities have also come up against the problems of decline and inefficiency in their urban neighbourhoods as a result of rapid urbanisation and the political and economic changes that have taken place over the past few decades. In this situation, the settlements and the rural-historical areas which had before developed through endogenous social mechanisms, local ways of making a living and collective knowledge have been hit more severely than other regions. Because of the uneven development processes and the horizontal spread of the metropolitan areas, a large number of these indigenous and rural settlements have suddenly been incorporated into the administrative and spatial framework of the cities, giving rise to *rurban ecosystems* or peri-urban areas (Ganjeali & Ghalandarian, 2024; Saghaei, 2020).

The shift speedily from traditional and rural local communities to peripheral and peri-urban areas has caused disruptions to the genuine economic and

social functions, led to a deterioration in environmental quality, resulted in weaker neighborhood ties, and brought about the erosion of local identity (Hosseini et al., 2023; Momeni & Kozegarkaleji, 2025).

Experience shows that urban interventions in these areas have generally not led to sustainable improvements in neighborhood conditions when they are mainly based on physical measures and physical renovation. This is due to the fact that such approaches have not given sufficient attention to the social, cultural, and institutional aspects of urban development, and the part played by local communities in decision-making and the implementation of projects has stayed limited (Amanzadegan et al., 2021; Akbari et al., 2023).

Because of these limitations, urban regeneration has come about as a thorough method of urban planning aimed at tackling the physical, social, economic, and environmental aspects of urban development at the same time by means of an integrated approach (Arthurson, 2003). In this framework, emphasis has been placed on the role of local communities and on the active involvement of citizens in the planning and implementation processes, so that community-based urban regeneration has been identified as one of the most important strategies for achieving sustainable regeneration (Shakour & Shojaeifard, 2021).

This method focuses on local capabilities, traditional knowledge, and social interactions and sees the residents of the neighbourhood as the main actors in the process of urban change. It aims at achieving sustainable urban development by enhancing social capital and encouraging citizen participation (Mangunsong et al., 2023; Ziaei, 2015; Smith, 2011).

In Iran too, policymakers and urban managers have in recent years tried to set up kinds of offices such as neighbourhood development offices in order to enable local communities to take part in the process of regeneration. The purpose of setting up these offices is to promote communication between residents, local organisations and urban management, and they are important for building trust, for helping to develop local institutions and for keeping an eye on the neighbourhood development programmes (Masoudi, 2022).

Yet, practical experience in carrying out these policies shows that problems like poor institutional

coordination, legal limitations, social difficulties, and the lack of effective indigenous models still prevent the full achievement of the aims of community-based regeneration in a great many urban neighborhoods (Najdaghi & Nejad Ebrahimi, 2019). Conversely, the complexity of the relationships between urban actors and the conflicts of interest existing among various institutions show that urban regeneration is not simply a technical or physical process; instead, it serves as a setting for social interactions, power negotiations, and communicative exchanges among different urban groups. This issue may be examined using perspectives such as Habermas's theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984). The metropolitan areas expand in a number of ways, one of these being the incorporation of outlying settlements. In accordance with the policies concerning spatial development, the Isfahan metropolis added the city of Khorasgan to its administrative and physical structure in 2013 as District 15. Yet an examination of the area's morphology and genealogy shows that Khorasgan has always been of a rural origin and evolved as a result of the linking together of eight historical rural centres—Abr, Buzan, Sofla, Olya, Kongaz, Pazveh, Khayadan and Ardaji—around lines of communication and agricultural land. Of these, the Sofla district is regarded as the earliest original nucleus in the development of the area.

Therefore, today this area is not merely an urban fabric, but rather a historical-urban fabric with an authentic rural origin and genesis. Despite its integration into the administrative organization of the metropolis, it continues to retain the physical layers, place-based neighborhood structure, and deeply rooted collective memory associated with its settlement and rural history. From a theoretical perspective, the rapid integration of such fabrics into the centralized urban management system has intensified the rupture of endogenous social mechanisms. One-sided and physical-oriented urban intervention approaches have largely lacked the capacity to understand the indigenous capabilities and complexities of the rural. Under these circumstances, urban regeneration can only be structurally sustainable if it goes beyond simplistic viewpoints and sets in motion the conditions needed for the reproduction of social capital and for the active involvement of the local community. The Sofla neighbourhood in Isfahan,

as a clear example of historical urban areas that originated in a rural setting, is now experiencing a wide range of physical, social and managerial problems. In view of this, the current study, using a futures-oriented method, aims to identify the main driving forces, examine the patterns of influence and dependence between the various factors, and produce plausible scenarios so as to provide a knowledge-driven and forward-looking basis for effective policymaking and planning regarding the regeneration of historical areas with rural origins. Historical fabrics with rural origins.

In this regard, the present article seeks to answer the following main research questions:

1. What is the present situation of the factors and forces that are affecting the future of community-based regeneration in the rural-historical area of the Sofla neighbourhood?
2. What plausible scenarios and possibilities can be imagined for the community-led regeneration of the Sofla neighbourhood?

2. Theoretical Literature Review

In recent years, community-based urban regeneration within historical areas has developed into an interdisciplinary method at the point where cultural heritage conservation, participatory governance, neighbourhood-based development, and urban foresight meet. As shown in the current body of literature, the success of this approach does not consist simply in carrying out physical interventions, but rather in redefining the relationship between local communities, historical heritage, and the structures responsible for urban decision-making. In this context, foresight, as a strategic tool, allows for a synergy between long-term urban visions and community-driven actions at the neighbourhood level. The existing theoretical literature stresses that cultural heritage in historical areas should be seen as a dynamic and value-creating resource in the urban ecosystem, not just as a set of static objects. It has been shown that heritage-based methods can act as promoters of sustainable regeneration by generating new economic, social and cultural values (Aldossary et al., 2025; Pulles et al., 2023). According to this view, conserving historical value in the process of urban regeneration is effective to the extent that it results in the recognition of local identity and the revival of social capital (Ricci et al., 2024).

It has likewise been stressed that historical continuity, spatial distinctiveness, and the quality

of the shared public spaces all play a crucial role in enhancing the feeling of belonging and social resilience (Tilaki & Farhad, 2025). Among the methods which can guarantee the functional dynamism of historical areas are those involving a multidimensional assessment of culture-based projects and the combination of economic interests with heritage conservation (Della Spina, 2024; Burnham, 2022). Yet certain studies cautions that if the logic of tourism or real-estate investment takes over, the historical character of areas tends to suffer from excessive commercialisation and a decline in social authenticity (Lak et al., 2020; Lei & Zhou, 2022). A key theoretical basis of community-based regeneration is the shift from demolition-focused and top-down approaches to network governance and co-production. Experience with regeneration in East Asia shows that collaborative workshops, the involvement of local facilitators, and flexible participation procedures have been effective in enabling communities and increasing the vitality of neighbourhoods (Yang et al., 2022; Baek & Kwon, 2020).

Models like the 'urban regeneration engine' show that the combination of governmental and social forces through a dual mechanism can act as an engine for transforming historical neighbourhoods (Shen et al., 2021; Momeni et al., 2026). Moreover, co-creation methods and public sociology introduce formal planning tools into the area of democratic dialogue and thus offer a foundation for redefining the role of citizens in the planning process (Polci & Pierantoni, 2024). In this framework, the main factors which drive community-based regeneration can be seen as part of an interconnected network involving local community participation and empowerment, trust and social capital, a sense of identity and attachment to the area within its historical context, the institutional structure and coordination between different agencies, the autonomy and capabilities of the local development offices, and the connection between environmental sustainability and quality of life. These factors influence the route to successful regeneration not on their own, but as a result of interacting with each other (Momeni et al., 2025). On the other hand, research into 'authoritarian participation' shows that formal and controlled participation can result in the reproduction of inequality and in the displacement

of the population (Meskell, 2018). Studies carried out in the Mediterranean area have likewise shown that it is essential to have genuine and inclusive participation if successful regeneration is to take place in historic districts (Li et al., 2020).

The combination of foresight with urban regeneration has created a new theoretical perspective in which planning at the neighbourhood level is linked to long-term thinking and the use of scenario-based methods. In this approach, strategic foresight—by making use of an analysis of macro trends and the social, technological, economic, environmental, political and values as well as legal (STEEPVL) framework.[1]—allows the detection of driving forces and the formulation of intelligent visions for urban development (Szpilko, 2020). A study that employed a political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal (PESTEL) analysis[2] together with causal layered analysis (CLA)[3] shows that the integration of futures research methods can help in developing alternative scenarios for urban development over the long term and in deriving policy options suitable to each scenario (Alegado, 2025). Similarly, a systematic review of participatory foresight has identified three main models: expert-driven scenarios, the quadruple-helix model (government–industry–academia–civil society), and public foresight (Neuhoff et al., 2023).

The fact that urban foresight methods show social preferences concerning possible futures to be diverse and differing among social groups indicates that it is necessary to consider a variety of perspectives when preparing regeneration scenarios (Sharifi et al., 2024). Even though the literature reviewed has individually dealt with the various dimensions of heritage value, participatory governance, and foresight, the overall synthesis of that literature shows a basic conceptual and operational gap caused by the failure to take into account the original centres of indigenous settlements and their essential differences from other types of urban area. Most of the existing studies have looked at 'community-based regeneration' and 'foresight' either in the context of ordinary urban areas or by using general physical methods, while failing to carry out an analytical and scenario-based examination of the process in 'historical areas with a genuine rural origin'. These areas, having been incorporated administratively

into metropolitan regions, have suffered from structural instability and therefore need the role of neighbourhood development offices to be redefined if their social capital and local collective memory are to be restored.

In fact, the main feature and contribution of the present study is that, instead of taking a purely physical and episodic approach, it focuses mainly on the historical core of the building fabric, on the reproduction of endogenous social capital and its rural ecosystem, and looks at the ways in which the challenges in these areas are met by means of a new type of urban structure known as "neighbourhood development offices". The research background shows that earlier studies had mostly assessed the performance of these offices in terms of the urban fabric alone, without taking into account their historical and rural origins. By contrast, this article, through incorporating the concept of the "authentic local community" and "community-based institutional mechanisms", provides a knowledge base for achieving place-based and sustainable governance. On this basis, since the theoretical foundations have been developed, any community-based urban regeneration in historical areas must take into account the physical, social, cultural, and institutional aspects and include the active participation of the local community in the decision-making processes. The foresight approach enables a better understanding of the possible routes of transformation and helps to avoid fragmented interventions by linking the analysis of driving forces with the development of alternative scenarios. That is why the present study, using structural scenario planning, aims to identify the factors that will influence things and to draw up plausible scenarios for the future of community-based urban regeneration in the Sofla neighbourhood of Isfahan.

3. Research Methodology

This study was carried out with the objective of carrying out foresight concerning community-based urban regeneration in historical areas by identifying and analysing the main factors that affect the performance of the neighbourhood development offices, which act as facilitating institutions, in the Sofla neighbourhood of Isfahan.

As regards its aim, the study belongs to the field of applied research; in terms of its character it is a descriptive-analytical one and made use of a mixed-methods approach that combined both qualitative and quantitative methods.

In the first stage, which was the qualitative one, the various factors influencing the performance of the neighbourhood development offices were identified and organised by means of written sources, by reviewing the relevant documents and regulations relating to the performance of these offices, and by carrying out a content analysis of the offices' terms of reference. The result of this stage was the establishment of six key dimensions—namely managerial, legal-regulatory, economic, planning, empowerment, and environmental understanding—together with the respective components of each dimension, these forming the basis on which the data collection instrument was designed.

The cross-impact matrix is not a reflective psychometric scale, and so in order to examine the reliability of the data in the cross-impact matrix used in this study, two complementary approaches were applied: one based on 'the percentage of agreement among the experts across all the dimensions and components' and the other involving 'a sensitivity analysis and a structural stability analysis of the matrix using MICMAC software'. The degree of agreement among the experts across all the dimensions was greater than the standard threshold of 70%, the average percentage of agreement being 82.1%. Moreover, in the second approach, a sensitivity analysis and a structural stability test of the matrix were carried out using the MICMAC software to evaluate the robustness of the model. When the rotation of the relationships was examined over cycles 2 to 4, it was found that 94.7% of the key variables had attained stability and settled into a stable position after two cycles of computation, thus confirming the structural stability of the matrix and the validity of the analyses. Finally, in order to assess validity, face validity was used; this involved the questionnaire being reviewed and approved after consultation with a group of faculty members and experts in the areas of urban planning and urban regeneration.

Table 1- Dimensions and Components for Performance Evaluation by Experts

Dimension	Component	Description of Component
Managerial	Integrated urban management	Coordination and synergy among various governmental and public organizations and institutions active within the area.
	Human resource management	Recruitment, retention, and empowerment of specialized and committed personnel in the local development office and related institutions.
	Formal recognition of the local development office	Formal recognition, possession of legal authority, and a clearly defined organizational position for the local development office.
Legal and regulatory	Ownership	Transparency, organization, and resolution of conflicts in property and land ownership documents within the historical fabric.
	Law enforcement	Enforcement guarantees, effective oversight, and the absence of conflicts among laws and regulations concerning conservation, renovation, and improvement.
	Incentive and facilitative regulations	The existence of incentive laws and regulations for attracting private and public participation.
Economic	Financial resources	Diversity, sustainability, and adequacy of financial resources allocated through government budgets, public-private partnerships, and other sources.
	Credit facilities and low-interest loans	Easy access for residents and small-scale developers to appropriate credit resources for the renovation and revitalization of properties.
	Local economy and entrepreneurship	Empowerment, strengthening, and creation of sustainable employment opportunities compatible with the historical and cultural identity of the neighborhood.
Planning	Plan preparation	A participatory and scientific process for developing operational plans that takes into account all physical, social, and economic dimensions.
	Plan approval	The speed, transparency, and efficiency of the final approval process for plans by competent legal authorities.
	Plan implementation	Operationalization, continuous monitoring, and periodic evaluation of approved plans in practice.
Empowerment	Training and capacity building	Organizing training courses to enhance residents' and stakeholders' knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward regeneration.
	Formation of community-based institutions	Establishing or strengthening community groups, councils, or cooperatives as mechanisms for community participation and oversight.
	Access to information	Transparency and equitable distribution of information related to projects, regulations, and decisions among all stakeholders.
Environmental understanding	Baseline studies and data recording	Conducting comprehensive field studies and systematically documenting the physical, social, and historical characteristics of the fabric.
	Stakeholder identification and needs assessment	Accurate identification of all stakeholder groups (residents, property owners, business owners, etc.) and prioritization of their needs and demands.
	Continuous monitoring of changes	Regular monitoring and evaluation of the social, physical, and economic impacts of implemented projects and spontaneous transformations within the fabric.

3.1. Geographical Scope of the Study

The study area of this research is the Sofla neighborhood in District 15 of Isfahan, which was previously part of the city of Khorasgan. This neighborhood is regarded as one of the oldest settlement and habitation nuclei in Khorasgan and, owing to its historical background, identity-related

components, and traditional spatial organization, has played a prominent role in shaping the urban identity of this area. The neighborhood is located in the southern part of Khorasgan and is bounded by Jey, Shariati, Abazar, and Fajr axes. The extent of its inefficient urban fabric is estimated at approximately 18.9 hectares. The Sofla

neighborhood, owing to the presence of a number of valuable historical elements and buildings, including the Imamzadeh Abol-Abbas (AS) and the historic Khan Mansion, is considered one of the important centers of the area's cultural and historical identity. Historical evidence and documentation also indicate that the initial nucleus of the city of Khorasgan originated in this area, after which the physical expansion of the city extended to other parts. However, following the incorporation of Khorasgan into the metropolis of Isfahan in 2013 and subsequent transformations resulting from spatial and physical development, a significant portion of the historical fabrics in this area became subject to structural changes. The outcome of these transformations, together with the unbalanced patterns of urban development in recent years, has led to weakened spatial and social cohesion and intensified deterioration in parts of the neighborhood. Under such circumstances, the Sofla neighborhood, as one of the areas prioritized for intervention within urban renovation and improvement programs, has attracted the attention of Isfahan's urban management. In addition, the presence of more than **140 hectares of inefficient urban fabric in District 15** indicates the depth and extent of development-related problems and challenges in this part of the city. Among these areas, the Sofla neighborhood, due to its concentration of historical elements, relatively high population density, and its position within the historical memory and identity of the area, represents a prominent case for examining community-based urban regeneration processes in historical fabrics.

Accordingly, by focusing on this neighborhood, the present study seeks to identify and analyze the drivers influencing the future of neighborhood regeneration in historical fabrics, thereby providing a basis for formulating effective policy strategies grounded in local community participation (Momeni, 2020).

3.2. Research Method

In the analytical stage, structural analysis was employed to investigate the reciprocal relationships among the components and determine the influential factors. In this regard, 15 academic and executive experts active in the fields of urban planning and urban regeneration were selected through purposive sampling. The criteria for selecting these individuals included relevant

educational qualifications, professional experience in urban regeneration, and familiarity with the mechanisms and performance of neighborhood development offices.

To address the contradiction between the community-based approach and technocratic decision-making, four trusted and prominent community members and activists of the Sofla neighborhood, from different age groups, who had maintained active and continuous participation—from the initial establishment of the neighborhood development office through major regeneration decision-making processes—were included in the expert panel as representatives of the social body, representing residents, property owners, and local business owners. The experts completed a cross-impact matrix, assessing the degree of influence and dependence of the research variables. The resulting data were analyzed using MICMAC software. The results of this process enabled the identification, classification, and prioritization of variables according to their level of influence and degree of dependence, ultimately leading to the extraction of the key drivers affecting community-based urban regeneration in historical fabrics. The extracted dimensions and components were organized into a coherent conceptual framework and considered as components of a dynamic and interdependent system. Accordingly, the final table of dimensions and components was regarded as the initial conceptual model of the community-based urban regeneration system, whose internal structure and pattern of interaction among its variables were examined through structural analysis. Subsequently, following the identification of the key drivers, a prospective scenario-writing approach, using Scenario Wizard software, was employed to develop alternative futures for community-based urban regeneration in the Sofla neighborhood of Isfahan. At this stage, based on the principal drivers and strategic uncertainties, a set of consistent and plausible scenarios was developed to depict and analyze a range of potential transformation pathways for this historical neighborhood. Ultimately, the results of the analyses provided a basis for presenting strategic recommendations aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of neighborhood development offices and improving the quality of the community-based urban regeneration process in historical fabrics.

It should be noted that in the qualitative phase of the research, components related to the performance of neighborhood development offices were extracted and classified based on library resources, upstream policy documents, and an examination of the terms of reference of neighborhood development offices. These components constituted the foundation for developing the conceptual framework of the research.

4. Research Findings

To investigate the reciprocal interactions among the variables, the cross-impact matrix was completed with the participation of experts and subsequently processed using MICMAC software. The output of this stage was presented in the form of an influence–dependence table, indicating the

degree of influence (influence power) and dependence (degree of susceptibility to influence) of each variable within the overall system structure.

This table constitutes the core of the structural analysis of the research, as it enables the identification and differentiation of variables with driving and strategic roles, dependent variables, and elements occupying regulatory or intermediary positions. Such an analysis goes beyond a purely descriptive assessment by providing an understanding of the internal logic governing the community-based urban regeneration system. It also serves as an analytical basis for prioritizing policies and directing future interventions in the historical fabric under study.

Table 2- Influence and Dependence of the Dimensions and Components of the Study

No.	Variable	Total Number of Rows (Influence)	Total Number of Columns (Dependence)
1	Integrated Urban Management	38	24
2	Human Resource Management	22	26
3	Formal Recognition of the Local Development Office	37	28
4	Ownership	18	27
5	Law Enforcement	28	27
6	Incentive and Facilitative Regulations	26	18
7	Financial Resources	28	28
8	Credit Facilities and Low-Interest Loans	18	21
9	Local Economy and Entrepreneurship	25	29
10	Plan Preparation	36	33
11	Plan Approval	25	31
12	Plan Implementation	29	39
13	Training and Capacity Building	22	27
14	Formation of Community-Based Institutions	29	31
15	Access to Information	29	26
16	Baseline Studies and Data Recording	23	22
17	Stakeholder Identification and Needs Assessment	32	28
18	Continuous Monitoring of Changes	22	22
Totals		487	487

When the results given in the influence–dependence table of the variables, as derived from the output of the structural analysis software, are examined, it is found that the community-based urban regeneration system in the Sofla neighbourhood adheres to a rather clear institutional and planning-focused approach. In other words, the future structure of this system is mainly dependent on the quality of local

governance and on its planning processes. It shows that certain variables act as structural drivers, while others mainly serve as dependent variables, as revealed by an analysis of the influence weights (the row totals) and the dependence weights (the column totals).

Of the variables identified, "integrated urban management", which has the greatest level of influence (38), along with "formal recognition of

the local development office" (37) and "plan preparation" (36), are some of the most important factors affecting the future of regeneration. This shows that even though community-based regeneration is based on public participation and agency, its sustainability and long-term viability rely on institutional cohesion, the consolidation of the legal status of the development office, and an improvement in the quality of urban planning. To put it simply, regeneration in the Sofla neighbourhood will be able to move forward only when the foundations of local governance and its institutional structure are properly strengthened.

On the other hand, a variable like "plan implementation", which has the highest degree of dependence (39), shows that the implementation stage is more influenced by the quality of the planning, institutional coordination, financial support, and legal support than it is itself a decisive factor. This result is in agreement with the field findings and with the views of residents, who had pointed out weaknesses in the implementation phase. It is therefore necessary that the implementation of plans rely on a stable and adequate decision-making and local management structure.

Other variables include 'the formation of community-based institutions', 'stakeholder identification and needs assessment', and 'the local economy and entrepreneurship', which hold an intermediate and dual position. This implies that they are capable of affecting other factors while at the same time being greatly affected by them. The fact that the social and economic aspects of regeneration can act as drivers of neighborhood development only occurs when the institutional and managerial foundations have reached the required level of effectiveness.

At a lower level of influence the variables such as "credit facilities and low-interest loans", "baseline studies and data recording", and "continuous monitoring of changes" show fairly balanced amounts of influence and dependence. They mainly act as supporting elements of the system and their performance is dependent on the activation of the more general managerial and planning variables.

The analysis shows that the main factors responsible for regeneration in the Sofla neighbourhood are mainly institutional, managerial and related to planning, while the implementation,

economic and social aspects are more frequently treated as dependent variables. It follows that if a desirable future for the regeneration of this historical neighbourhood is to be achieved, it is necessary to strengthen local governance, give formal status to the development institutions and improve the quality of urban planning since these are essential prerequisites for activating the other aspects of regeneration.

To interpret the dynamics governing the community-based urban regeneration system in the Sofla neighborhood, the direct influence–dependence map shown in Figure 1 was developed. By positioning the variables according to their degree of influence (vertical axis) and degree of dependence (horizontal axis), this map enables the identification of the functional role and position of each variable within four distinct analytical areas and serves as a key tool for explaining the future-oriented structure of the system.

In the first area (upper-left), variables are positioned that have high influence and low dependence and are therefore recognized as fundamental and structure-forming drivers. The findings indicate that components such as "integrated urban management," "formalization of the legal position of the neighborhood development office," and, to some extent, the "plan preparation process" are concentrated in this area. The positioning of these variables within the driver area indicates that future regeneration developments in the Sofla neighborhood depend more than any other factor on strengthening institutional, managerial, and planning foundations, while other components of the system respond to changes in these structural layers.

The second area (upper-right) comprises variables that simultaneously have high influence and high dependence and therefore possess a sensitive, unstable, and strategic nature. Variables such as "plan implementation," "formation of community-based institutions," "development of the local economy and entrepreneurship," and "stakeholder identification and needs assessment" are located within this area. The position of these variables indicates that any targeted intervention in, or disruption to, these factors can produce multilayered consequences throughout the regeneration system and direct its future toward either sustainability or inefficiency.

The third area (lower-right) contains variables with

limited influence and high dependence, indicating their strong dependence on other components of the system. The presence of “plan implementation,” with the highest level of dependence, in this area, together with some operational and economic indicators, demonstrates that the implementation process in the Sofla neighborhood functions less as an independent driver and more as a direct outcome of the quality of governance, institutional cohesion, and planning effectiveness. Accordingly, strengths or weaknesses in plan implementation can be regarded as reflections of the performance of higher-level managerial and institutional structures.

Finally, the fourth area (lower-left) consists of variables with relatively low levels of both influence and dependence, whose role is primarily supportive and complementary. Components such as “baseline studies and data recording” and “continuous monitoring of changes” are located in

this area. Although these factors do not independently possess sufficient capacity to direct structural transformations, once the key drivers are activated, they can contribute to improved efficiency, institutional learning, and the sustainability of the regeneration process.

Overall, the analysis of the influence–dependence map indicates that the structure of community-based urban regeneration in the Sofla neighborhood has an institutional–planning-oriented nature, and the future success of this process is directly dependent on strengthening integrated urban management and consolidating the legal and institutional position of neighborhood development offices. The positioning of social and economic variables in intermediate areas also indicates that these factors function as intermediary links, and the practical realization of regeneration objectives will depend on activating structural drivers at higher levels of decision-making and local governance.

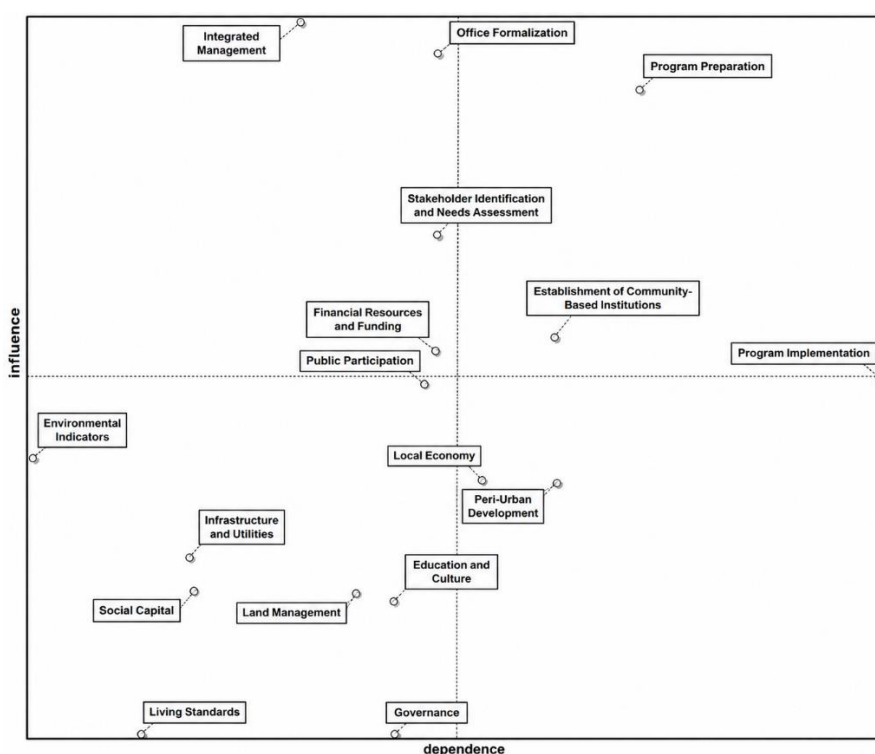


Figure 1. Output Map of the Dimensions and Components of the Study

Building on the results obtained from the influence–dependence map, the scenario-writing stage can be initiated. The distribution of the key variables in the output map indicates that a number of drivers are located in the upper-right quadrant,

characterized by simultaneously high influence and high dependence. This condition indicates that the community-based urban regeneration system in the Sofla neighborhood possesses a degree of dynamic uncertainty and structural sensitivity, a characteristic

that constitutes one of the principal prerequisites for entering the scenario-writing process. Accordingly, the presence of unstable and interactive drivers in this quadrant demonstrates that different and distinguishable futures for the regeneration of the Sofla neighborhood can be envisioned and that the system under study has moved beyond a static or entirely linear state. Therefore, in the next stage of the research, with the aim of explaining potential future pathways and analyzing the consequences of each pathway, the selected drivers are entered as inputs into Scenario Wizard software so that alternative scenarios for community-based urban regeneration in this historical fabric can be developed and evaluated.

In this study, the selection of drivers for entry into the scenario-writing stage was conducted purposefully and based on the results of the structural analysis. To this end, all variables influencing community-based urban regeneration within the study area were initially identified, and their degrees of influence and dependence were calculated using cross-impact analysis. The results of this analysis showed that only five drivers were located in the quadrant characterized simultaneously by high influence and high dependence, namely, the upper-right quadrant of the influence–dependence map. The focus on these drivers was based on the fact that variables located in this quadrant play the

greatest role in shaping the future of the system while simultaneously being the most strongly affected by changes in other variables. In other words, these drivers not only determine the future pathways of urban regeneration but also encompass the greatest degree of uncertainty and sensitivity to environmental changes. Therefore, they are considered the most appropriate variables for entering the scenario-writing stage, because scenarios are fundamentally shaped around key uncertainties and strategic drivers.

In contrast, variables located in the other areas of the influence–dependence map perform different functions. Variables with high influence and low dependence primarily represent relatively stable contextual conditions, whose changes over the time horizon under consideration are limited. Variables with low influence and high dependence are mainly consequences of interactions among the principal drivers and, by themselves, lack the capacity to shape alternative futures. Variables characterized by both low influence and low dependence also possess relatively lower strategic importance. Accordingly, introducing these variables into the scenario-writing stage would not only fail to enhance the analytical richness of the scenarios but could also increase unnecessary complexity and reduce the clarity of the results.

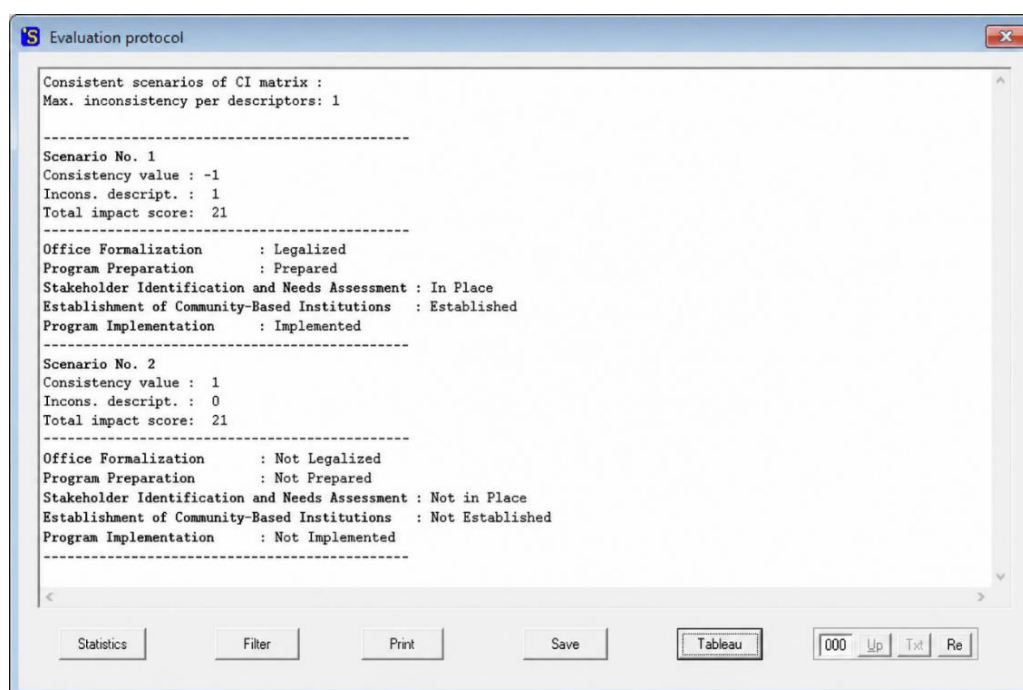


Figure 2. Scenario Development Output

In the scenario development stage, in order to identify plausible futures based on the interaction of key drivers, a Cross-Impact Balance (CIB) analysis was conducted using the Scenario Wizard software. In this method, different combinations of driver states are evaluated in terms of their internal consistency, and only those combinations that demonstrate sufficient logical coherence are accepted as valid scenarios. Accordingly, to prevent the analysis from being confined to a single deterministic pathway while maintaining analytical consistency among the variables, the consistency threshold was set at 0.85.

The selection of this value indicates that the extracted scenarios exhibit a high degree of coordination among the drivers, while simultaneously allowing for the emergence of more than one plausible future. If the consistency threshold had been set at the maximum value of 1, only one perfectly consistent combination would have been identified as a scenario, thereby restricting the futures analysis to a single deterministic pathway. In contrast, setting the threshold at 0.85 enabled the identification of several relatively consistent pathways that nevertheless maintained an acceptable level of logical coherence.

The results of this stage indicated that, at this level of consistency, two consistent scenarios for the future of community-based regeneration in the study area could be extracted. These two scenarios represent two distinct yet structurally feasible patterns of interaction among managerial, planning, environmental-awareness, and social-empowerment drivers. They can therefore serve as a basis for analyzing plausible futures and formulating appropriate strategies within the urban regeneration process.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Assessing the sustainability and regeneration of historic-rural fabrics within metropolitan areas requires a profound understanding of the structure of inter-variable relationships within the ecosystem of these neighborhoods. As one of the valuable historic-rural cores of Isfahan, Sofla Neighborhood in Khorasgan has faced a conflict between centralized management and its indigenous socio-social structure following its incorporation into the metropolitan area. Achieving sustainable regeneration in this area requires the identification of institutional, physical, and social drivers and a

precise distinction of their roles in shaping the neighborhood's future. The structural analysis conducted in this study, with the aim of elucidating these relationships, classified 18 main variables into three conceptual categories based on the standard concepts of structural foresight:

Primary Key Driver (System Input)- The variable "Integrated Urban Management," characterized by the highest level of direct and indirect influence and very low dependence, is positioned in the input zone of the system. This variable functions as the primary structural driver and determines the overall direction of the regeneration system in Sofla Neighborhood.

Dual and Critical Variables (Core Basis of Scenario Development)- Five variables, namely "Formalization of the Local Development Office," "Preparation of the Regeneration Plan," "Stakeholder Identification and Local Needs Assessment," "Establishment of Community-Based Institutions," and "Implementation of the Regeneration Plan," are positioned in the northeastern zone. These variables simultaneously possess high levels of influence and dependence and therefore function as key leverage points and regulatory mechanisms within the system. Due to their leverage characteristics and high transformative sensitivity, these five variables were selected as input variables for developing future scenarios and were entered into the Scenario Wizard software.

Dependent and Output Variables- Economic variables, such as credit facilities, loans, and financial resources, as well as service and basic infrastructure variables, are positioned in the lower regions of the diagram, indicating their dependent and consequential nature within the regeneration process of Sofla Neighborhood. The positioning of "Formalization of the Local Development Office" at the top of the dual and leverage variables indicates that the future of regeneration in the historic-rural fabric of Sofla Neighborhood—the initial and community-oriented core of Khorasgan—is influenced above all by institutional dynamics. Following the incorporation of the neighborhood into the Isfahan metropolitan area, its indigenous ecosystem underwent a rapid transition into a peri-urban area. The primary reason for the central role of the "Formalization of the Local Development Office" is that these fabrics experience a structural disconnect between

centralized metropolitan management and traditional social structures. If granted legal and administrative formalization, the Local Development Office can function as an “institutional translator,” transforming top-down decisions into locally oriented practices that are acceptable to and supported by the local community.

Another important finding is the relatively low importance of economic and financial variables compared with institutional variables in initially directing the system. In historic-rural fabrics surrounding metropolitan areas, the allocation of development funds or financial facilities cannot, by itself, serve as a driver of sustainable regeneration. In the absence of a legitimate institutional structure, the injection of financial capital often leads to land speculation, gentrification, increased living costs, and, ultimately, the displacement of original residents. Therefore, economic variables are essentially subordinate and outcome-oriented, and their success is conditional upon the establishment of an institutional management framework as a prerequisite.

On the other hand, the findings demonstrate that “social participation” cannot guide the system without the support of formal institutions. In the regeneration literature, a clear distinction should be made between “genuine participation (empowerment)” and “nominal participation (ceremonial participation).” Nominal participation is reduced to one-way information dissemination or the symbolic presence of residents in meetings; genuine participation, however, emerges when local structures possess decision-making and bargaining power.

In Sofla Neighborhood, without the formalization of the Local Development Office and the establishment of community-based institutions, traditional social capital, such as trust and neighborhood relations, remains fragmented and ultimately results in nominal participation. Therefore, formalizing local institutions is a necessary condition for transforming community capacities into genuine participation.

Comparison of these findings with domestic and international models reveals important contextual differences. Compared with the Northeast Asian model of urban-rural fabric regeneration, where strong and centralized state management constitutes the primary driver, the dynamics of the

system in Sofla Neighborhood require a balance between urban management and traditional social capital. In the historic fabrics of Southern Europe, regeneration is based on commercialization, specialized tourism, and local financial markets, whereas in Sofla Neighborhood, the rural-urban identity and locally embedded institutions take precedence over purely commercial dimensions. In most historic fabrics of the country's metropolitan areas, regeneration programs have also failed due to the dominance of a physical and top-down approach. The findings of this study demonstrate the necessity of a paradigm shift from “physicalism” to “participatory institutionalism” in fabrics with rural origins.

This analytical model can be generalized to other historic-rural and peri-urban fabrics in Iran that have experienced incorporation into metropolitan areas, such as the peripheral fabrics of Shiraz, Tabriz, and Karaj. The common and challenging issue across all these areas is the conflict between centralized metropolitan management and the indigenous socio-ecological structure of local neighborhoods.

In the next step, the five dual and critical variables—formalization of the Local Development Office, plan preparation, stakeholder identification, institutional formation, and plan implementation—were introduced into the Scenario Wizard software as key variables for scenario development. Through the analysis of the consistency matrix, two main scenarios were extracted:

Scenario 1 (Empowered and Institution-Oriented Future)- The Local Development Office is granted legal formalization, integrated urban management is achieved, and regeneration proceeds through participatory decision-making and the preservation of historic assets, such as Imamzadeh Abol-Abbas and Khan Mansion.

Scenario 2 (Constrained and Dependent Future)- The lack of formalization of local institutions leads to the fragmented implementation of localized physical interventions, the weakening of social capital, and the gradual deterioration of the neighborhood's indigenous identity.

Based on the results of the structural analysis and the extracted scenarios, the following recommendations are proposed to achieve the desirable future of urban regeneration in historic fabrics:

1. Institutionalizing the Formal Structure of Local Development Offices: Establishing a stable administrative and legal framework for Local Development Offices as an intermediary between the metropolitan management of Isfahan and the original residents of Sofla Neighborhood. These offices should recognize the capacities of local governance and traditional social structures, and ensuring their continued presence would be essential to realizing the desirable scenario.

2. Integrating Planning Across Institutional Levels and the Local Community: Developing regeneration plans through genuine collaboration among urban institutions—including the municipality, cultural heritage authorities, and the neighborhood council—and community-based institutions, with an emphasis on the active preservation of historic areas, valuable buildings such as Khan Mansion and Imamzadeh Abol-Abbas, and the remaining physical and livelihood layers originating from the neighborhood's rural background.

3. Strengthening Social Capacities and Training for Local Participation: Empowering local groups, indigenous residents, cultural associations, and

neighborhood youth by redefining traditional social capital and transforming it into participatory awareness. Enhancing mechanisms for dialogue and collective decision-making can ensure the continued presence of original residents within the fabric and prevent the loss of local identity resulting from accelerated peri-urbanization processes.

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Authors' contributions

The authors equally contributed to the preparation of this article.

Conflict of interest

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آینده‌نگاری بازآفرینی اجتماع‌محور در بافت‌های تاریخی شهری با خاستگاه روستایی: مطالعه موردی محله سفلی اصفهان

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چکیده

۱. مقدمه

گسترش کالانشهرها و ادغام تدریجی سکونتگاه‌های پیرامونی با ساختار فضایی و مدیریتی شهرهای بزرگ، زمینه‌ساز تغییرات گسترده در سازمان فضایی، اجتماعی و نهادی این سکونتگاه‌ها شده است. محله سفلی خوراسگان در اصفهان نمونه‌ای از بافت‌های تاریخی با خاستگاه روستایی است که در اثر توسعه کالبدی و اداری شهر اصفهان، از ساختار مستقل روستایی فاصله گرفته و با چالش‌هایی همچون فرسودگی کالبدی، تضعیف هویت و سرمایه اجتماعی، گسست میان مدیریت شهری و جامعه محلی و احتمال تشدید فرایندهای اعیانسازی مواجه شده است. تجربه‌های متعارف بازآفرینی که عمدتاً بر مداخلات کالبدی، سرمایه‌گذاری مالی و اقدامات پروژه‌محور تأکید دارند، در چنین بافت‌هایی قادر به پاسخ‌گویی کامل به پیچیدگی‌های اجتماعی، تاریخی و نهادی نیستند. از این رو، گذار از رویکرد کالبدگرا و تمرکزگرا به سوی بازآفرینی اجتماع‌محور، حکمرانی محلی و ظرفیت‌سازی نهادی ضرورت می‌یابد. از سوی دیگر، ماهیت پیچیده و متغیر آینده این بافت‌ها، استفاده از رویکردهای آینده‌نگر و سناریومحور را ضروری می‌سازد. پژوهش حاضر با تمرکز بر محله سفلی اصفهان، درصدد شناسایی پیشران‌های کلیدی و روابط متقابل میان عوامل مؤثر بر بازآفرینی اجتماع‌محور و ترسیم سناریوهای محتمل آینده است تا چارچوبی برای بازآفرینی بوم‌محور و پایدار این نوع بافت‌ها ارائه دهد.

۲. مبانی نظری تحقیق

مبانی نظری پژوهش بر پیوند سه رویکرد اصلی حکمرانی محلی، نهادگرایی جدید و آینده‌نگاری استوار است. در رویکردهای جدید بازآفرینی، پایداری فرایند بازآفرینی صرفاً به بهبود کالبدی و تأمین منابع مالی وابسته نیست، بلکه تحت تأثیر کیفیت ساختارهای نهادی، میزان مشارکت جامعه محلی، ظرفیت سازمانی و نحوه تعامل میان

مبسوط

بازیگران قرار دارد. در این چارچوب، الحاق سکونتگاه‌های تاریخی با خاستگاه روستایی به ساختار کالانشهری، نیازمند بازتعریف روابط میان مدیریت شهری و جامعه بومی است. نهادگرایی جدید بر نقش قواعد رسمی و غیررسمی، ساختارهای حقوقی و سازمان‌های محلی در شکل‌دهی به رفتار بازیگران و نتایج بازآفرینی تأکید دارد. همچنین، رویکرد آینده‌نگاری با شناسایی پیشران‌های کلیدی، بررسی روابط متقابل متغیرها و تدوین سناریوهای مختلف، امکان مواجهه فعال با عدم قطعیت‌های آینده را فراهم می‌کند. در این میان، دفاتر توسعه محله می‌توانند به‌عنوان واسطه نهادی میان مدیریت شهری و جامعه محلی، نقش مهمی در احیای سرمایه اجتماعی، تقویت مشارکت و هدایت فرایند بازآفرینی ایفا کنند.

۳. روش تحقیق

پژوهش حاضر از نظر هدف، کاربردی-توسعه‌ای و از نظر ماهیت، مبتنی بر رویکرد کیفی-کمی و آینده‌نگاری ساختاری است. در مرحله نخست، با استفاده از مطالعات نظری و بررسی ادبیات موضوع، مجموعه‌ای از متغیرهای مؤثر بر بازآفرینی اجتماع‌محور شناسایی و در نهایت ۱۸ متغیر اصلی برای تحلیل ساختاری انتخاب شد. داده‌های موردنیاز از طریق ارزیابی خبرگان و تکمیل ماتریس اثرات متقابل گردآوری شد. سپس با استفاده از نرم‌افزار MICMAC و بر اساس الگوی گودت، میزان اثرگذاری و اثرپذیری متغیرها تحلیل و جایگاه ساختاری آن‌ها تعیین شد. در مرحله دوم، متغیرهای دوجبهی و دارای ماهیت اهرمی و تحول‌آفرین به‌عنوان متغیرهای کلیدی وارد نرم‌افزار Scenario Wizard شدند. در این مرحله، ماتریس سازگاری میان حالت‌های مختلف متغیرها تحلیل و سناریوهای محتمل و سازگار آینده برای بازآفرینی محله استخراج شد. این ترکیب روش‌شناختی امکان گذار از شناسایی عوامل مؤثر به تحلیل روابط متقابل و سپس تدوین آینده‌های بدیل را فراهم کرده است.

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۴. یافته‌های تحقیق

یافته‌های تحلیل ساختاری نشان داد که ۱۸ متغیر مورد بررسی از نظر اثرگذاری و اثرپذیری در سه سطح اصلی قابل تفکیک‌اند. در میان متغیرهای شناسایی‌شده، مدیریت یکپارچه شهری دارای بیشترین میزان اثرگذاری و اثرپذیری پایین بوده و به‌عنوان پیشران کلیدی اولیه سیستم شناخته شد. این یافته بیانگر اهمیت بنیادین هماهنگی مدیریتی و یکپارچگی تصمیم‌گیری در موفقیت بازآفرینی بافت‌های تاریخی با خاستگاه روستایی است. همچنین پنج متغیر رسمیت دفتر توسعه، تهیه برنامه، شناسایی ذی‌نفعان، تشکیل نهادها و اجرای برنامه در ناحیه دوجبه‌ی قرار گرفتند. این متغیرها به دلیل برخورداری از اثرگذاری و اثرپذیری هم‌زمان، ماهیتی اهرمی و تحول‌آفرین داشته و به‌عنوان ورودی اصلی تحلیل سناریو انتخاب شدند. در مقابل، متغیرهای اقتصادی و شاخص‌های خدماتی-پایه در ناحیه خروجی قرار گرفتند که نشان‌دهنده وابستگی آن‌ها به متغیرهای نهادی و مدیریتی است. تحلیل سناریویی در نهایت به شناسایی دو سناریوی اصلی شامل «آینده توانمند و نهادمحور» و «آینده محدود و وابسته» منجر شد.

۵. بحث و نتیجه‌گیری

نتایج پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که پایداری بازآفرینی در بافت‌های تاریخی با خاستگاه روستایی، بیش از آنکه به مداخلات کالبدی یا تزریق اعتبارات مالی وابسته باشد، به ساماندهی نهادی، یکپارچگی مدیریت و ظرفیت‌سازی اجتماعی وابسته است. جایگاه مدیریت یکپارچه شهری به‌عنوان پیشران اصلی سیستم نشان می‌دهد که نبود هماهنگی میان نهادهای مسئول می‌تواند اثربخشی اقدامات بازآفرینی

را کاهش دهد. همچنین، دفتر توسعه محلی در صورت برخورداری از رسمیت حقوقی و نهادی، می‌تواند نقش «مترجم نهادی» را در برقراری ارتباط میان مدیریت شهری و جامعه بومی ایفا کند و زمینه تبدیل سرمایه اجتماعی موجود به مشارکت واقعی و مؤثر را فراهم آورد. یافته‌ها همچنین نشان می‌دهد که سرمایه‌گذاری مالی بدون ایجاد ساختارهای نهادی مشروع و مشارکتی می‌تواند به تشدید فرایند اعیانسازی و تضعیف حضور ساکنان بومی منجر شود. بر این اساس، تحقق سناریوی «آینده توانمند و نهادمحور» مستلزم حرکت از رویکرد مداخله‌ای و کالبدگرا به سوی نهادگرایی مشارکتی و بازآفرینی بوم‌محور است. مهم‌ترین راهکارهای پیشنهادی عبارت‌اند از: اعطای رسمیت حقوقی به دفاتر توسعه محلی، یکپارچه‌سازی برنامه‌های حفاظت از هویت تاریخی و روستایی، تقویت تشکلهای اجتماع‌محور، شناسایی و مشارکت فعال ذی‌نفعان و پیوند دادن برنامه‌ریزی با سازوکارهای اجرایی. در مجموع، نتایج بیانگر آن است که بازآفرینی پایدار این بافت‌ها زمانی امکان‌پذیر خواهد بود که ابعاد کالبدی، اجتماعی، فرهنگی و نهادی به‌صورت یکپارچه مورد توجه قرار گیرد و جامعه محلی از جایگاه مخاطب برنامه‌ها به جایگاه کنشگر اصلی فرایند تصمیم‌گیری ارتقا یابد.

کلیدواژه‌ها: آینده‌نگاری، بازآفرینی اجتماع‌محور، بافت‌های تاریخی،

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