



Rethinking Rural Development: Analyzing Paradigmatic Intersections in Iran's Spatial Planning Projects

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Abstract

Purpose- The ongoing research endeavors to identify and critically analyze the paradigmatic rural development model embedded within Iran's spatial planning frameworks. As innovative philosophical perspectives in rural development emerge, the necessity of examining and understanding the foundational principles guiding these initiatives has become increasingly vital. This importance is recognized from a theoretical perspective and in practical efficiency and effectiveness, particularly relevant for geographers engaged in spatial analysis.

Design/methodology/approach- The research aims to contribute valuable insights to enhance rural development strategies and inform effective spatial planning in Iran by exploring these dimensions. The research strategy uses a mixed-methods approach, allowing for the selection of various methods that are aligned with the overall research objectives. Initially, the qualitative content analysis method was employed. Data collection utilized several tools, including observation, document analysis, and questionnaires. A non-probability sampling technique was applied, and one document was selected from each of the nine study areas. Researchers needed to consider multiple criteria during judgmental sampling, such as clustering levels, time units, geographic units, and the number of document samples, alongside consultations with academic experts. The document analysis, grounded in qualitative content analysis, aimed to objectify findings.

Findings- The research revealed that critical characteristics of the paradigmatic model for rural development in the provincial SSP include "objective ontology," "positivism epistemology," "Separate praxis," and "ethics." The findings indicate that the degree of alignment between the selected SPP and the paradigmatic model of retrogressive rural development is rated at 3.73. This score suggests that the retrogressive perspective remains dominant despite advancements in "ideological" and "institutional" reforms.

Originality/value- Consequently, the characteristics associated with the paradigmatic elements of rural development have regressed within the SPP framework.

Keywords- The dominant paradigm model, Rural development, Plans for improving Iran's territory, Regressive development, Nine regions.

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How to cite this article:

Mokhtari Karchegani, A., Tavakoli, M., Pourtaheri, M. & Navarro Valverde, F.A. (2024). Rethinking rural development: Analyzing paradigmatic intersections in Iran's Spatial Planning Projects. *Journal of Research & Rural Planning*, 13(4), 19-38.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.22067/jrpp.v13i4.2410-1111>

Date:

Received: 12-10-2024

Revised: 28-11-2024

Accepted: 12-12-2024

Available Online: 12-12-2024

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1. Introduction

Rural development models have evolved significantly, reflecting planners' changing perspectives on understanding and addressing the complexities of rural life.

Traditionally, these strategies relied heavily on exogenous models emphasizing external resources and expertise to determine development pathways. This approach often resulted in dependency, weakened local agencies, and insufficient community engagement in the development process. Consequently, many rural areas have become stagnant and disconnected from their unique socio-cultural contexts.

In contrast, contemporary paradigms emphasize endogenous development, prioritizing local resources and community participation (Olmedo & O'Shaughnessy, 2022). This approach fosters local ownership and empowerment, enabling communities to define their development paths. It encourages shared governance and resilience by building partnerships among local actors and aligns with complexity theory, which acknowledges the unpredictable nature of social change (Vercher et al., 2023).

Recent frameworks advocate for a territorial approach integrating each locality's specific economic, social, and environmental dimensions. This perspective recognizes that effective rural development must consider the unique characteristics of each territory, including its cultural and historical context. The "rural web" model illustrates this connection by highlighting how people, resources, and activities within a territory interact to enhance development outcomes. A robust local network can significantly improve the effectiveness of rural policies by leveraging local strengths and addressing specific needs.

Despite these advancements, challenges persist in various contexts, particularly in developing countries like Iran. After five decades of implementing spatial planning policies (SPPs), these plans have struggled to align with rural communities' social and spatial structures. Researchers such as Azkia & Dibaji Forooshnai (2016) argue that the rural sector still needs to achieve its appropriate place in the development planning process. The shortcomings of the current paradigmatic model in Iran's SPP indicate a

significant gap in the theoretical foundations necessary for effective policymaking. Zahedi et al. (2013) emphasize that rural development planning in Iran lacks a fundamental theory, leading to insufficient progress in improving the living conditions of rural communities. The absence of a coherent theoretical framework has resulted in inefficient policy implementation and a lack of comprehensive rural development plans. Amani et al. (2020) also highlight that the planning system has not adequately considered paradigmatic demarcation in formulating rural development policies, significantly reducing the effectiveness of research projects at the village level. As Ahmadi Shapourabadi & Mottaghi (2022) point out, insufficient theoretical and intellectual reflection has been on the cognitive foundations necessary to support rural development policymaking since the Islamic Revolution.

Identifying a transparent paradigmatic model for rural development in Iran's SPP is essential to address these issues. Researchers argue that resolving this intellectual confusion is crucial for revitalizing villages from current crises and returning them to their natural growth cycles. The literature review suggests that addressing planning and policy formulation gaps is vital for improving rural development outcomes. Without a coherent theoretical framework guiding these initiatives, efforts will likely face persistent challenges that hinder progress (Mokhtari Karchegani et al, 2020). The analytical framework of this study focuses on understanding the intellectual paradigm of rural development within Iranian spatial planning. Historical studies reveal three dominant paradigms: exogenous rural development, endogenous rural development, and neo-endogenous rural development. Each paradigm offers distinct perspectives on understanding rural dynamics and emphasizes different approaches to fostering growth. For a comprehensive analysis of these paradigms, one must examine four main elements: ontology, epistemology, praxis, and ethics. This review clarifies the status of these elements within the dominant paradigmatic model of rural development in Iran's SPP while providing an optimal model from the researcher's perspective.

The synthesis aims to elucidate the philosophical foundations of three principal approaches to rural development: exogenous development, classical

endogenous development, and endogenous development. By integrating theoretical frameworks with practical implications, this study seeks to fill existing gaps in the literature regarding the influence of rural development paradigms on spatial planning (SPP), particularly within the context of Iranian geography. This methodology enhances the comprehension of rural development frameworks that have yet to be explored in academic discussions.

Consequently, the shift from exogenous to endogenous models marks a significant turning point in the discourse on rural development. Contemporary paradigms focusing on local resources and community participation offer pathways toward sustainable growth tailored to specific community needs. However, these efforts may continue to falter without addressing theoretical shortcomings in contexts such as Iran's SPP. Identifying the coordinates of the paradigmatic model can illuminate various dimensions of projects that foster effective policies, empowering local communities and enhancing their resilience to global challenges. This research aims to contribute to academic discourse and inform practical strategies that can revitalize rural areas through informed policymaking based on solid theoretical frameworks.

2. Research Theoretical Literature

2.1. Paradigmatic elements and SPPs: A conceptual framework

A paradigm encompasses the shared beliefs, values, and techniques a scientific community utilizes, serving as a standard for conducting research (Kuhn, 1962). Leavy (2014) likens paradigms to colored sunglasses that influence perception in research practices. Philosophers of science identify two main perspectives on paradigm composition. Lincoln & Guba (1985) assert that a paradigm consists of four core elements: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. Conversely, Leavy (2014) presents a more fluid understanding, positioning paradigms alongside ontology and epistemology while emphasizing philosophical, practical, and ethical dimensions.

This study aligns with Lincoln & Guba's (1985) framework, categorizing paradigms as philosophical wholes composed of ontology, epistemology, praxis, and ethics. Including praxis and ethics reflects their broader conceptual scope compared to methodology and axiology. Praxis connects theory to practice, while ethics encompasses moral considerations beyond traditional axiological frameworks (Figure 1).

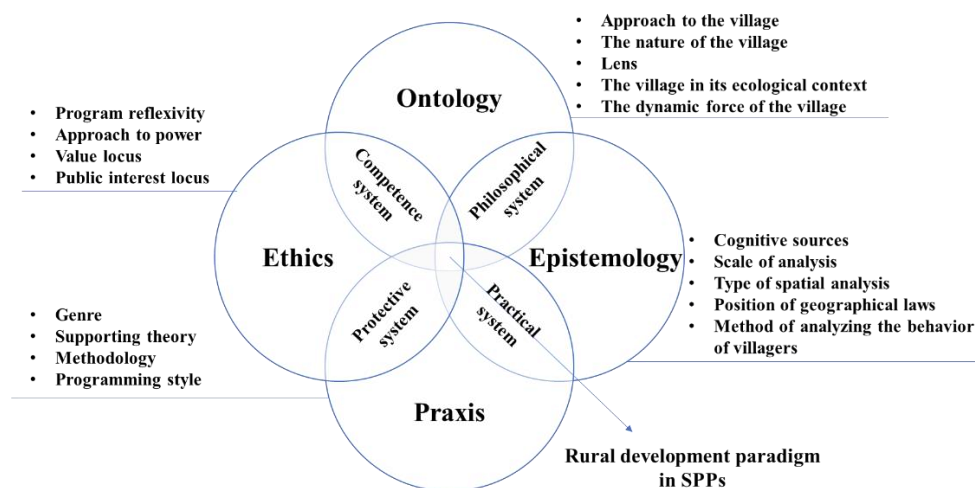


Figure 1. The Framework of the Paradigmatic Model of SPP Evaluation

Ontology is a foundational aspect of research paradigms, focusing on the nature of phenomena that constitute reality (Scott & Usher, 2004). It encompasses beliefs about social reality,

addressing what can be known and how knowledge is constructed (Leavy, 2014). Guba & Lincoln (1998) articulate this inquiry by asking, "What is the form and nature of reality? And what is there to

know about it?" In qualitative research, knowledge-making is viewed as a dynamic and productive process. Truth is not an absolute entity waiting to be discovered; it is contextual and multifaceted. This perspective values subjectivity and redefines objectivity by acknowledging one's value system (Hesse-Biber et al, 2004). Such an ontological framework positions rural development as a qualitative reality, interpreting villages as social constructs shaped by complex human-environment interactions.

Epistemology further examines how knowledge about these phenomena is obtained. While ontology asks, "What can be known?" epistemology queries, "What knowledge is valid?" Sol and Heng (2022) define epistemology as a philosophical belief system that explores the nature of knowledge generated during research. Researchers engage in scientific inquiry while recognizing that their theoretical and practical interests influence their findings (Bresler, 2006). This approach challenges traditional notions of neutrality, positioning participants as co-creators of knowledge. In rural development studies, the question of valid knowledge remains contentious among geographers. However, they can draw from diverse knowledge sources, including intuitive, formal, logical, and empirical knowledge (Mokhtari Karchgani et al., 2020).

Praxis encompasses the actions arising from the dynamic interplay between theory and practice, facilitating experiential learning through a reciprocal process. Defined as an accepted practice or custom, praxis transforms ideas into action. Freire (1972) emphasizes that praxis involves reflection and action aimed at societal transformation. He asserts that understanding the world necessitates a commitment to creating a more equitable society. Central to praxis is integrating theory and practice, as articulated by Ellison & Langhout (2020), who note that praxis embodies interdependence rather than separation. White (2007) further describes praxis as ethical, self-conscious, and accountable action, encompassing knowing, doing, and being. In rural development, praxis focuses on the theory-practice nexus to foster experiential learning and skill development to generate positive change in rural contexts. The actions and designs of rural geographers exemplify their spatial praxis, contributing to their knowledge and enhancing

their capacity to effect transformative changes in rural areas (Bruckmeier & Tovey, 2008).

Ethics serves as a critical bridge among ontology, epistemology, and praxis in research, ensuring the integrity of scientific inquiry. David (2015) define ethics as evaluating right and wrong conduct in research, emphasizing respect for participants, data, and outcomes. Central to ethical considerations are three key issues: ethics, values, and reflexivity. Researchers must contemplate the social implications of their work, particularly when involving human subjects, and be mindful of data confidentiality and the potential impact of their findings. Values in research relate to the researcher's ontological and epistemological choices, including the research's public utility and the inclusion of marginalized populations. Reflexivity involves recognizing the influence of power dynamics and biases throughout the research process (Finlay, 2002). This self-awareness is essential for promoting social justice within research.

Ethics encourages planners to critically assess underlying assumptions in development plans and consider ethical implications during implementation in rural development contexts. By integrating ethical considerations into their frameworks, researchers can better navigate the complexities of rural development while fostering equitable outcomes for all stakeholders. Thus, ethics emerges as a vital discourse in rural development research paradigms, guiding researchers in their commitment to ethical practices and social responsibility.

2.2. Bridging Paradigms and Practices

Exploring rural development paradigms has emerged as a significant yet underexamined philosophical topic within rural geography. Existing literature indicates that while foundational studies have contributed to this area, a comprehensive understanding of the intellectual frameworks underpinning rural development still needs to be improved (Dower, 2013; Guinjoan et al., 2016). Scholars such as Healy (2004), Kay (1998), Murdoch (2000, 2003), Nelson (1984), Shortall (2008), and more recently, Yang and Qian (2023) have laid the groundwork for analyzing the trajectory of rural development. Notable contributions from Ambrosio-Albalá and Bastiaensen (2010), Cejudo and Navarro (2020),

and [Scott et al., \(2019\)](#) further elucidate the evolution and implications of various paradigms that shape rural development strategies.

Despite these contributions, a critical gap exists in global studies regarding the philosophical frameworks of rural development paradigms. While individual studies have examined specific aspects, this research distinguishes itself by adopting a philosophical approach to paradigm analysis, setting it apart from existing global investigations. The OECD project highlights this distinction by examining the interplay between rural development paradigms and the LEADER initiative, revealing significant methodological shortcomings in prior studies ([Ceï et al., 2018](#)).

Recent literature increasingly supports integrating endogenous development into rural programs, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of specific components within the rural development paradigm. This research categorizes studies into various themes, contributing to a broader understanding of rural development dynamics. Contributions from [Douglas \(2006\)](#) on neoliberal ideology's impact on rural development models and [Olsen's \(2008\)](#) exploration of realist ontology in empirical research illustrate the diverse philosophical perspectives informing current scholarship. Additionally, [Low \(2010\)](#) underscores the importance of historical analysis in shaping sociological viewpoints on rural development.

[Dower \(2013\)](#) introduces contemporary thought within the European Union, framing it as a new paradigm focused on enhancing citizens' quality of life while considering environmental relationships. [Peterson et al., \(2020\)](#) advocate for process planning theory in policymaking, emphasizing contextual analysis's role in successful rural development initiatives. The significance of territorial development emerges as a crucial theme in recent studies, with [Marsden et al., \(2005\)](#) emphasizing participatory approaches incorporating territorial perspectives.

Economic analyses within the rural development paradigm reveal that financial considerations extend beyond economic benefits. [Vaswani et al., \(2005\)](#) highlight the importance of extensive networks in fostering rural development. [Burgos and Bocco \(2020\)](#) propose multifaceted innovation approaches aligned with neo-endogenous principles.

Recent studies have highlighted the role of social

learning and knowledge management. [Mattner's \(2006\)](#) examination of cognitive learning through farmer participation underscores the value of experiential knowledge in rural initiatives. [Brookmeyer & Tovey \(2008\)](#) address data scarcity and scientific uncertainty challenges, advocating for improved knowledge management practices.

Research on Iran's rural development paradigm indicates a significant oversight regarding philosophical perspectives among rural geographers. Previous studies by [Behzadnasab \(2000\)](#), [Roknuddin Eftekhari \(2004\)](#), and [Zahedi et al., \(2013\)](#) primarily focus on planning without addressing philosophical infrastructures. This study aims to fill this gap by identifying three critical paradigms: exogenous, classical, and neo-endogenous development. This research seeks to establish a relevant paradigmatic model for contemporary rural development practices that align with modern intellectual standards by transcending traditional boundaries.

In conclusion, this investigation addresses abstract concepts and emphasizes practical relevance by linking experimental plans to specific paradigms related to rural development. This connection represents an innovative contribution to the field, highlighting an area that has received limited attention globally and remains unrecognized mainly by Iranian rural geographers.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Geographical Scope of the Research

This research employs content analysis within a One reason for selecting these documents is their placement within an institutional context characterized by a centralized state planning system and an oil-dependent economy, prepared and implemented under distinct conditions. This study focuses on the "Nine-Division Regionalization in the Sixth Development Plan (2019-2025)." According to the government performance report, after preparing the second national planning plan in 2000 and reviewing and operationalizing it until 2002, measures have been designed and initiated to prepare planning studies in the provinces since 2005. Despite these efforts, political considerations led the 12th government to attempt to secure approval for all provincial land planning plans from the "Supreme Council of Land Planning" in 2010.

3.2. Methodology

The SPPs program is both valid and highly visible,

consistently attracting significant attention from academics and practitioners over the years. Its legal emphasis and upstream policy-making nature have had a substantial impact. SPPs hold great importance within the planning system due to their prescriptive and guiding nature; however, they have faced numerous challenges in determining more effective methods for their planning processes. For instance, in 2015, the National Program and Budget decided to incorporate a new study section titled "Management and Executive Practice" to gather suggestions aimed at improving control, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms for development programs. Typically, this mechanism involved forming provincial working groups under the supervision of the Supreme Council for Provincial Land Planning, which would include managers and experts from government and public institutions. Nonetheless, a significant portion of the plans were approved prior to this period and lack this mechanism. Additionally, no actions have been taken to formalize these proposals into operational mechanisms.

mixed-methods approach to examine the features of the paradigmatic model of rural development across various projects. The methodology is grounded in an idealistic ontology with a constructivist nature and follows an interpretive epistemology. It posits that the dynamics of rural development in planning processes are influenced by the thoughts, values, and interpretations of individuals involved in program creation (Torabi et al., 2023). The study aims to discover the subjective meanings, orientations, and strategies attributed by project actors, thereby revealing deeper intellectual layers of rural development and clarifying the role of the dominant paradigm in spatial planning programs (SPP).

3.3. Data and information collection strategy

The current research employs a methodology and data collection tools structured around the stages of qualitative content analysis. In the initial stage, the researcher will utilize observation and document study methods to identify categories and themes within SPP. This will involve a comprehensive review of documents and literature, including

articles in both English and Farsi and relevant theses related to the subject. The indicators derived from the theoretical foundations and prior literature will be aligned with the SPP to extract the desired themes.

In the second stage, primary data collection methods, such as document observation, will be employed to construct a conceptual and semantic network of SPP's prevailing rural development paradigm. The third stage involves experts preparing a questionnaire to validate the conceptual findings and experimental model. The data necessary for analyzing the research question will be gathered using observation, document study (text), and questionnaire. Each tool serves a specific purpose based on its unique strengths.

3.4. Statistical population

The statistical population for this study includes all SPPs in Iran, specifically those prepared up to the year 1403. The decision to select Iran's SPPs as the statistical population is based on several criteria:

- One of the most important reasons for choosing SPP is the lack of a scientific and coherent study about the role of their theoretical and philosophical foundations in guiding the planners' vision for the country's rural development.
- SPP is an upstream reference for the country's rural development.
- Selecting SPP based on the country's planning zoning helps us to identify the differences in the plans' attitudes towards rural development.

3.5. Sample, sample size, sampling method, and strategy

The samples for this study were selected on a provincial scale, covering the period from 2004 to 2024. The project selection criteria depend on the researcher's access to relevant materials, leading to the use of available sampling methods. Consequently, documents will be utilized to estimate the sample size. Based on the collected documents, an effort will be made to select a representative document from nine study areas. In this context, SPPs from various provinces will be chosen using judgmental sampling, document accessibility, and consultations with academic experts (Table 1).

Table 1. Research strategy for sampling the documents of SSP in Iran

Sampling method	Probability sampling type	Strategy for text unit sampling
Improbable	Multistage sampling	We are developing a sampling framework that clusters SPPs based on various criteria, including levels, time units, geographical units, and the number of samples from SPP documents across Iran's nine regions. This framework employs judgmental sampling, which is informed by our access to information and consultations with experts in the field.

3.6. Analysis Method

Qualitative content analysis was employed to analyze the selected projects. This method facilitates the subjective interpretation of textual data through classification, coding, theme identification, and conceptual model formation (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The conceptual framework of the paradigm model, derived from the theories of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Leavy (2014), served as the foundation for the analysis. This framework acts as a manifesto throughout the research, revealing the fundamental aspects of rural development programs. The research process unfolds in three distinct stages.

In the first stage of initial coding, informed by the literature on the rural development paradigm, the characteristics of the four fundamental elements of the paradigm model were identified along with their subthemes. Based on the studied texts, the researcher identified four main elements of the paradigm: “ontology,” “epistemology,” “praxis,” and “ethics.” This classification aligns with the boundaries of the paradigm model presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Leavy (2014). To enhance the reliability of the findings, an inter-rater method was utilized; researchers independently read and re-coded the data file, discussing the inclusiveness of their coding and interpretations in several meetings. The sensitivities surrounding the boundaries of the paradigm elements posed challenges to classification. In subsequent meetings, efforts were made to identify and eliminate overlaps in categories and subcategories. A final coding table detailing the characteristics of the paradigmatic elements of rural development in each project was then created.

To further enhance result validity, individual categories were weighted according to an evaluation protocol. Individual recording units

were scored using a triangulation technique that involved surveying implementers, employers, and

experts associated with each project. These scores were assigned on a Likert scale ranging from “1” to “5” and summed, implicitly incorporating a weighting system representing each category's frequency or intensity within individual projects. A standardized criterion was also established by averaging these categories to obtain theme scores for the four fundamental elements of the rural development paradigm and, ultimately, for the dominant paradigm model. A standard average value of “3” was set to compare categories.

The second step involved identifying projects that most and least exhibit characteristics of the dominant paradigm model. A comparative case analysis explored contexts where the existing paradigm model is dominant, examining barriers in each project and categorizing them by theme. To elucidate differences, notes taken during the research process were referenced, allowing for an assessment grounded in the scientific literature regarding the contribution of the paradigmatic model of rural development and spatial planning programs (SPPs).

Finally, the validity of measurements and reliability of assessments in qualitative content analysis were evaluated using a "face" validation method. According to Putt and Springer's guidelines (1989: 243), researchers reached consensus on categories regarding precise meaning, clarity, and non-overlapping nature through multiple meetings. Researchers achieved this consensus on themes and categories collaboratively throughout these discussions.

4. Research Findings

The findings of this research are grounded in a thorough content analysis of documents from the nine selected regions. Additional interviews with academic and executive experts were conducted to enrich these findings, allowing for a more nuanced understanding. Consequently, the results integrate insights from expert interviews with the content analysis of SPPs across these regions. This research approach systematically compares SPPs by themes and concepts, enabling the identification of critical characteristics and paradigmatic features of rural development for spatial comparison. By synthesizing these themes, the study aims to construct a grand narrative that encapsulates the overarching paradigm governing rural development within the country's SPPs.

A critical aspect of this investigation is its focus on articulating the paradigmatic story of rural development in SPPs. The researcher strives to present a cohesive narrative that maintains factual integrity regarding each research project. Rather than sequentially recounting the details of each project, the researcher integrates relevant facts within the thematic narrative. This approach not only preserves the coherence of the storyline but also enhances clarity for readers, preventing potential confusion.

The research findings indicate that, among the four themes and 17 main categories identified as a paradigm model of retrogressive rural development, selected SPPs were thoroughly analyzed. The overall compliance score of 3.73 suggests that regressive perspectives dominate despite ideological and institutional developments and reforms. This analysis reveals that the prevailing views on rural development remain entrenched, highlighting the need for further exploration and potential reform in planning practices. The persistence of these paradigms poses challenges to effective rural development strategies, emphasizing the importance of addressing underlying issues within the SPP framework.

The analysis of the findings across the four themes reveals distinct levels of prominence within the paradigm model. The "Separate praxis" theme

stands out with the highest score of 3.99, indicating its significant manifestation. Following closely is "Confirmative Epistemology," which scored 3.83. The theme of "Grey Ethics" scored 3.77, while "Objective Ontology" contributed the least, with a score of 3.36, reflecting its more negligible impact (Table 2).

The analysis of the selected documents reveals that, in terms of objective ontology, the Spatial Planning Project (SPP) in Khuzestan province leads with a score of 4.85, followed by the Mazandaran Plan with a score of 4.2, and the Ardabil Plan with a score of 3.76. These findings indicate that these projects are the most closely aligned with the principles of objective ontology within the context of rural development.

The analysis indicates that Tehran province, with a score of 2.23, Fars province at 2.49, and Sistan and Baluchistan at 2.76, show the least compliance with the theme of positivism epistemology. In contrast, Khuzestan province leads with a score of 4.75, followed by Mazandaran at 4.45 and Ardabil at 4.21, reflecting the highest compliance in this theme. Conversely, Tehran's SSP scores are 2.93, while Sistan Baluchistan and Fars province follow with scores of 3.12 and 3.36, respectively, indicating lower alignment with positivism epistemology. The analysis of compliance with the theme of Separate praxis reveals that Khuzestan province's Spatial Planning Project (SPP) leads with a score of 4.96, followed closely by the Central plan at 4.69 and the Ardabil plan at 4.41, indicating their strong alignment with this theme. In contrast, Tehran province's SPP scores 2.98, making it the least compliant, followed by the Fars plan at 3.09 and the North Khorasan plan at 3.75. The analysis indicates that the manifestation of grey ethics is highest in the Khuzestan province's Spatial Planning Project (SPP), which scored 4.85. The Central plan follows closely with a score of 4.5, and the Ardabil plan has a score of 4.39. In contrast, the lowest scores were recorded for Tehran province's SPP at 2.33, the Fars plan at 2.33, and the Sistan and Baluchistan plan with a score of 2.84 (Table 2).

Table 2. Scores of the themes and paradigmatic categories of the ruling rural development according to the selected SSP

Provinces	Mazandaran	Ardabil	Hamadan	Khuzestan	Fars	Tehran	Markazi	Baluchistan	Sistan and Shomali	Khorasan
Anti-rural vision	4.44	3.38	3.19	4.81	2.63	2.38	3.81	2.38	4.13	
Functional lens	4	4.5	4.38	4.88	2.38	2.38	2.88	2.75	2.38	
Understanding the village in the physical-economic context	4.25	3.75	4	5	2.75	1.75	3.25	3	3	
External dynamic force	4.1	3.4	2.9	4.7	2.2	2.4	3	2.9	3	
Objective ontology	4.2	3.76	3.62	4.85	2.49	2.23	3.23	2.76	3.13	
Objective cognitive resources	4.2	3.8	3.4	5	2.8	2	3.8	2.4	2.6	
Cognitive scale of the village unit	4.57	3.57	3	4.64	2.36	1.93	3.5	2.79	3.36	
Absolute and relative space	4.5	4.5	4.67	5	3.5	3.5	4.5	3.83	3.67	
Equalization based on spatial laws	4.27	4.45	4.64	4.09	3.64	3	4.18	2.36	4.27	
Causality of rural phenomena	4.7	4.7	4.5	5	4.5	4.2	4.9	4.2	3.4	
positive epistemology	4.45	4.21	4.04	4.75	3.36	2.93	4.18	3.12	3.46	
Linear genre (Euclidean)	4.33	3.67	3.33	5	2.17	2.5	5	2.67	4	
The governance of the theory of rural modernization and transformation	3.17	4.67	3.67	5	2.67	2.33	4.67	4	3.33	
Quantitative, sometimes quantitative methodology	4.4	4.73	4.73	5	3.18	3.09	4.64	4.18	4.18	
Prescriptive and centralized planning style of government type	4.71	4.59	4.76	4.82	4.35	4	4.47	4.29	3.47	
Separative praxis	4.15	4.41	4.12	4.96	3.09	2.98	4.69	3.79	3.75	
Neglect of reflectivity	4.54	4.31	4.31	4.38	2.62	2.31	4.62	2.69	2.85	
Adopt a neutral approach to power	3.8	4	2.5	5	2.8	2.3	4.6	2.5	2.6	
Exclusivity	5	4.57	4.71	5	2.71	2.71	5	2.71	4	
Protecting the interests of specific groups	3.44	4.67	4.56	5	2.78	2	3.78	3.44	4.78	
Gray ethics	4.2	4.39	4.02	4.85	2.73	2.33	4.5	2.84	3.56	
The paradigmatic model of rural development prevailing in SPPs	4.26	4.19	3.96	4.84	2.94	2.63	4.15	3.12	3.47	

Figure 2 compares the scores for the elements (themes) of the prevailing rural development paradigm based on the analyzed SPPs. This cumulative analysis indicates that the provincial rankings in Iran adhere to a regressive rural development paradigm model. Statistical findings reveal that out of 20 cumulative points derived

from the four themes within the paradigmatic model, Khuzestan province achieved the highest score of 19.5. In contrast, Tehran province recorded the lowest score of 10.5, reflecting its limited alignment with the demonstrated elements of this rural development paradigm.

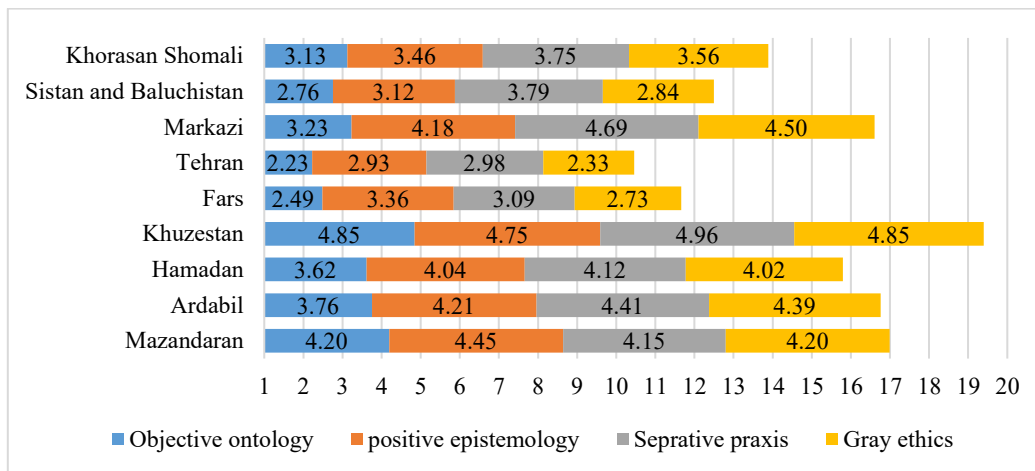


Figure 2. Cumulative comparison of the scores of the dominant rural development paradigm elements according to the studied SSP

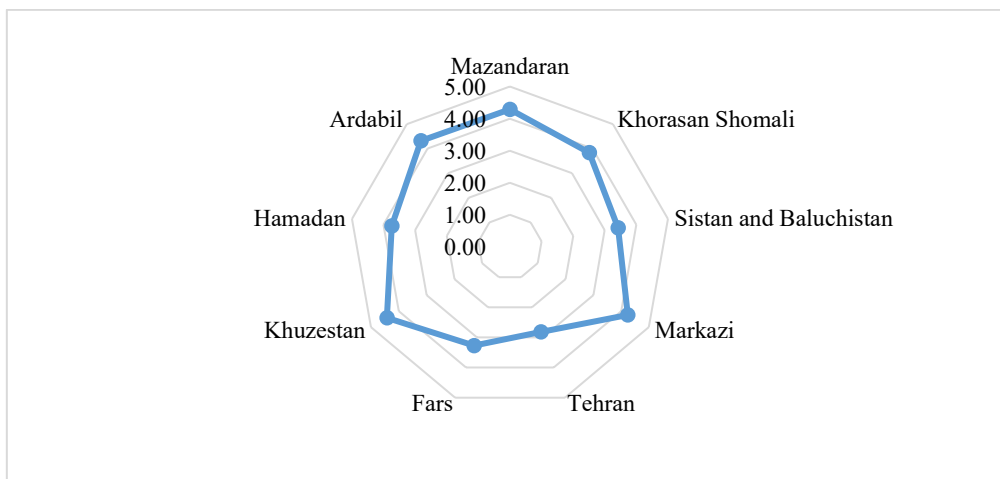


Figure 3. The number of points of the rural development paradigm model according to the study SSP

The data presented in Radar Figure 3 offers a comprehensive overview of the status of the rural development paradigm model across selected provinces. This chart summarizes the final output based on four themes and 17 main categories related to the paradigm model. Each province's survey documents are evaluated on a scale where higher scores indicate a greater degree and intensity of characteristics associated with the regressive rural development paradigm in the selected plans. Khuzestan province's Spatial Planning Project (SPP) scores 4.84, the highest among the provinces, while Tehran province's SPP, with a score of 2.63, ranks the lowest. This stark contrast illustrates the characteristics associated with adherence to the regressive rural development paradigm model. The data indicates that Khuzestan exemplifies a more substantial alignment with this

paradigm, whereas Tehran reflects a significant departure.

The view of SPPs on rural development can be succinctly summarized as "small improvements while maintaining the regressive paradigm model." This shift indicates that researchers have transitioned from affirmative to post-positivism viewpoints. Figure 4 illustrates this trend, showing the inclination of plans toward various philosophical approaches over time, particularly at the moment of their approval. The graph reveals that the tacit knowledge of executives and supervisors in preparing experimental plans has had a more substantial influence than the accumulation of scientific knowledge over time. The situation illustrates that although the Ardabil province Spatial Planning Project (SPP) was developed four years after the Fars province SPP,

the same project manager has continued in this role, compiling the plan based on evidence-based principles. Since 2014, the Fars province SPP has been available for other provinces seeking to create

their plans. However, it is noteworthy that three of the five selected designs have advanced without referencing these established top-tier designs.

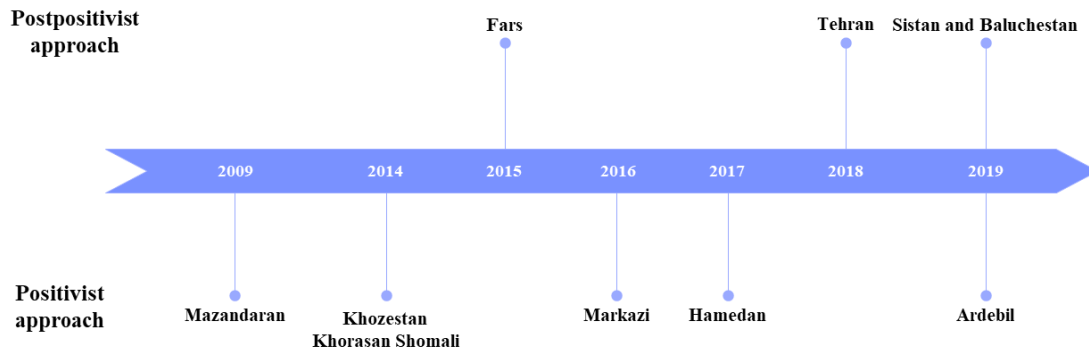


Figure 4. The tendency of plans towards philosophical approaches by the time of their approval

Participants cited various reasons for the differing tendencies of designs toward philosophical approaches. For instance, Participant 4 noted that project implementers often compile documents without leveraging previous experiences and lessons learned. This lack of reflection hinders the creation of a network of shared thoughts and opinions necessary for scientific accumulation. Additionally, Participant 6 echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that the ongoing nature of this issue perpetuates the disconnect from prior knowledge and insights. This perspective highlights the need for a more collaborative approach that integrates past experiences into current planning processes, fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement in rural development strategies.

He noted that completing the provincial assembly documents was perceived as a political achievement driven by governmental pressure at the time. This situation compelled executives to fulfill their responsibilities—essentially documenting services—without regard for content

or the prevailing intellectual framework. While all perspectives are valid, another viewpoint emerges: executives and employers have largely neglected discussions surrounding philosophical and theoretical foundations. This oversight has allowed formalities to overshadow substantive content, resulting in a focus on the "central service description" within the selected documents.

Figure 5 illustrates the zoning of points representing the dominant rural development paradigm model in the studied SPPs. The findings indicate that Khuzestan province's SPP, with a score of 5, demonstrates the highest adherence to the paradigm model in rural development. Following this, the SPPs of Central Province, Hamedan, Mazandaran, and Ardabil each scored 4. The SPP of North Khorasan province received a score of 3, while Sistan and Baluchistan and Fars provinces scored 2. Lastly, Tehran province's SPP, with a score of 1, reflects the lowest degree of alignment with the model.

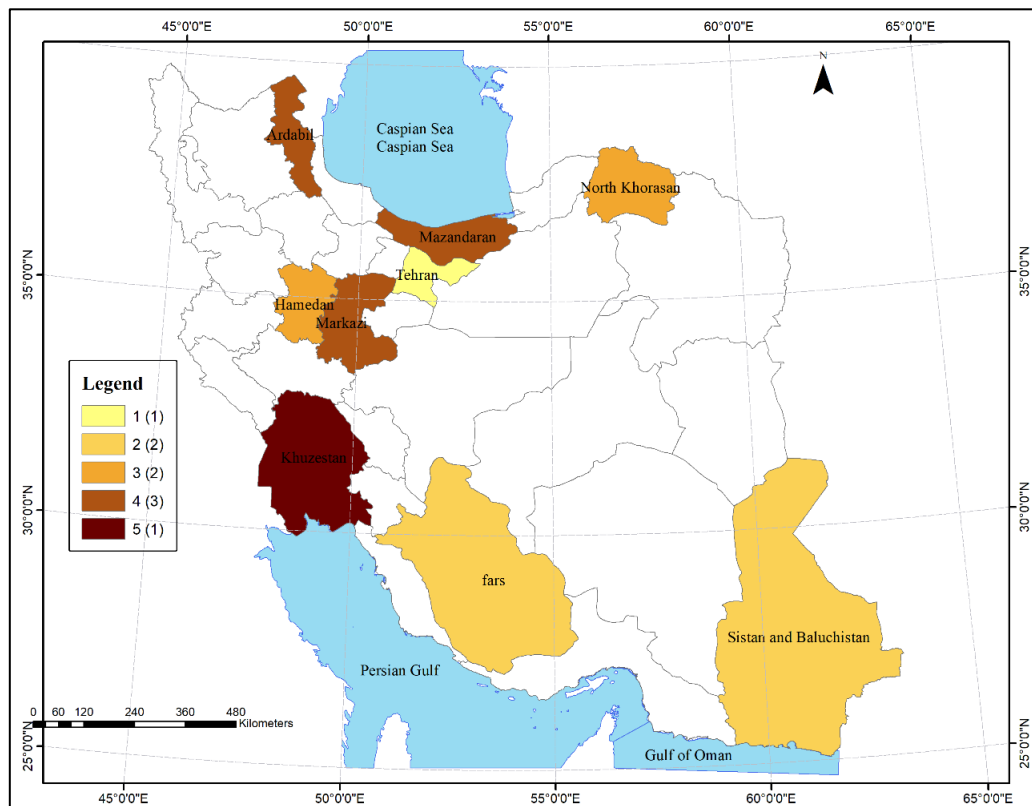


Figure 5. Zoning of the points of the dominant rural development paradigm model in the studied SSP

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study is based on analyzing documents from nine selected Spatial Planning Programs (SPPs). The results were derived from synthesizing findings obtained through qualitative content analysis and expert interviews. The assessment of the paradigmatic model allowed for a comparative analysis of SPPs that exhibit geographical and socio-economic variations. Additionally, the identified themes and categories facilitated the characterization of the rural development model for spatial comparison. Upon entering the research area, the researcher gathered valuable information that had previously received limited attention. This was accomplished through various methodologies, including observation, document content analysis, semi-structured interviews, and vector notes. The objective was to document the programs objectively and capture them as lived experiences, transforming these observations into concepts informed by the researcher’s theoretical sensitivity. The research findings reveal new dimensions of the rural development model within Iranian SPPs, detailed in the following sections.

The findings indicate that analyzing rural development projects through the paradigm model can uncover theoretical and practical directions and challenges that have previously lacked a methodological framework for evaluation. It is essential to recognize that this study's paradigm model's evaluation framework is not fixed or inflexible. The objective was to illuminate various aspects that reflect prevailing actions and policies, suggesting that the paradigm analysis model may evolve based on contextual realities.

This analysis positions the paradigm model as a comprehensive and integrated framework for understanding the role of villages within development programs. Supporting these findings, [Cejudo and Navarro \(2020\)](#) argue that, contrary to common mechanistic views, rural development projects serve as a platform for crystallizing fundamental philosophical and scientific ideas within the macro-planning systems of countries, as formulated by executive managers. However, the results also highlight that discussions surrounding rural development are hindered by deficiencies in both "knowledge" and "implementation" within

these projects (Momani, 2024).

The ontological study has unveiled new perspectives on project promoters' insights regarding rural development. The worldview of project promoters significantly influences rural development practices. Generally, planners have approached villages and their inhabitants through various lenses, which can profoundly impact the future of these regions and the broader territorial landscape. For instance, the analysis revealed that anti-rural sentiments are evident in the plans for Mazandaran, Khuzestan, Markazi, and North Khorasan, whereas more progressive approaches to preserving and developing villages are apparent in the projects for Tehran, Shiraz, and Sistan and Baluchestan. The promotionist perspective on villages can primarily be defined through two viewpoints: viewing the village as a "useless element in the vastness of the territory" and recognizing the incorporation of rural areas into the urbanization process. A content analysis of SPP documents aimed at distinguishing urban from rural areas illustrates how these perceptions shape planning and development strategies. Additionally, studies by Taleb (2018) and Amani et al. (2020), align with this research, indicating that project promoters exhibit ambivalence toward rural policymaking. In projects from Mazandaran, Markazi, and Khuzestan, for example, the term "urban" is associated with concepts such as centrality, professionalism, and specialized services, while "rural" is framed as marginal or peripheral, characterized by simplicity.

Another significant finding is the emphasis on economic factors in rural development within these plans. This perspective is closely tied to a traditional and inefficient rural economy that fails to address the challenges facing these areas through connectivity expansion alone. Furthermore, Ray (2006) and Mokhtari Karchegani et al. (2024), argue that most rural programs fall under the agricultural sector. By focusing predominantly on agriculture, these projects attempt to tackle rural issues primarily through this sector's lens, potentially overlooking broader dimensions of rural development.

The findings indicate that uncertainty regarding the village's role within the territorial system has resulted in programs that lack a coherent vision. In the mid-2010s, project promoters shifted their approach from an "anti-rural" stance to a "rural

protection" strategy. However, this transition was not consistently applied across all programs developed during the 2010s and beyond. For instance, the Khuzestan project, although approved in the late 2010s, did not include an independent section on rural studies and was instead categorized under the agricultural section. Badri et al., (2019) and Ghaderi et al., (2017) identified a limited perspective on the village and an exclusive focus on the classical agricultural economy as significant shortcomings in the evaluation of these projects. In practice, such policies lacked the necessary innovations to foster collaborative efforts and were often misaligned with the spatial context of the villages.

The research findings indicate that projects utilize objective cognitive resources to comprehend rural phenomena. Researchers primarily depend on observable and measurable data to analyze social issues related to these phenomena. The demand for consensus and a common understanding among researchers arises from their pursuit of "objective data," a principle significantly shaped by the perspectives of positivist experts. In this context, the term "objectivity" becomes contentious, as proponents of positivism interpret it differently than their critical counterparts. This divergence underscores the complexities surrounding objectivity in research, where the quest for unbiased and measurable data often clashes with the acknowledgment of the subjectivities inherent in the research process.

Proponents of positivism equate objectivity with the selection of measurable indicators and statistical data. In contrast, advocates of the modern critical school view it as a capacity for evaluation by the scientific community. Recognizing this nuanced distinction can enhance the clarity of the methodological orientation in rural studies projects.

The findings indicate that the epistemological system governing projects shapes the cognitive resources, the analysis of space, and the behavior of the actors involved. A positivist framework has dominated various cognitive aspects of these projects. As an abstract concept characterized by diverse interactions, relations, and flows, space is ultimately defined by how these elements are represented. Planners have concentrated on the idea that to ascertain the function of a space, they must either reference its components or consider it

as a whole. This focus reflects an ongoing epistemological debate regarding space and the representation of its function across different frameworks.

The findings reveal that this epistemological debate is particularly pronounced in the projects for Khuzestan, Markazi, Mazandaran, Hamedan, and North Khorasan, where space is depicted as a singular, independent, and objective phenomenon. [Mokhtari-Karchegani et al. \(2020\)](#) describe this situation as spatial atomism. The studies conducted demonstrate that most projects examine rural areas within strictly defined political borders, presenting these locations not as networks of flows but as separate and fragmented units. This approach neglects the potential for understanding the coherent and integrated nature of the place. In contrast, other studies align with these findings by challenging the conventional cognitive understanding of rural space ([Douglass, 2006, 2018](#)) and emphasizing the importance of viewing villages as interconnected and relational systems ([Espancia, 2014](#)). This perspective advocates for a more integrated approach to rural development that recognizes the complex relationships both within and between villages, rather than treating them as isolated entities.

The findings reveal the inadequacy of local development strategies in identifying effective spatial development practices. This inadequacy stems from the emphasis placed by projects such as those in Mazandaran, Ardabil, Hamadan, Khuzestan, and Sistan and Baluchestan on causal analyses of rural phenomena while neglecting the socio-spatial processes that historically shape these phenomena. Consequently, this oversight undermines the analytical capacity of local community collective actions for project promoters ([Harvey, 2006; Lang et al., 2022](#)). As a result, policies implemented without a thorough understanding of spatial development's internal and external processes are likely to fail, particularly when external forces such as the central government impose initiatives. In contrast to studies conducted in developing countries—such as those by [Stead \(2012\)](#), [Berisha et al. \(2021\)](#), and [Nowak et al. \(2022\)](#)—the present study demonstrates that provincial planning projects in Iran exhibit low effectiveness in strengthening or enhancing collective actions aimed at specific goals within the provinces.

Despite these shortcomings, promoters do not perceive a need to establish a coherent paradigm model in provincial planning, as [Badri et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Ghaderi et al. \(2017\)](#) noted. This lack of coherence has resulted in weak coordination among the institutions responsible for implementing these projects, which is inconsistent with the requirements of territorial planning in rural areas.

The findings indicate that "discrete praxis" has generated multiple consequences for the projects. Promoters have attempted to complete various components of the projects linearly, leading to a misalignment with the social context of the policies. All projects tend to prioritize "quantity" in spatial planning, particularly in SSPs ([Forester, 2015](#)). This tendency stems from the interplay between "objectivity" and "realization," suggesting that methods employed in rural areas emphasize the selection of measurable and countable indicators ([Mokhtari et al., 2023](#)). Mathematical models play a crucial role in designing spatial strategies, underscoring the technical epistemology inherent in provincial SSPs, which utilize statistical models to analyze complex spatial systems. Consequently, measuring rural phenomena predominantly relies on quantifiable resources such as data and statistics.

In spatial policy-making, the foundation of rural knowledge is rooted in the lived experiences of experts and officials. The literature has presented strong criticisms of the technocratic tendencies exhibited by planners. The findings indicate that theoretical assumptions often rely on imitation and fourth-order models to measure rural phenomena despite the varying contexts in which these assumptions are applied. Given this evidence, it is reasonable to assert that rural development practices within these schemes are influenced by positivist epistemology. Moreover, a disconnect exists between rural planning practices and their supporting theories. As [Forester \(2015\)](#) noted, this practice primarily delineates a linear development trajectory, positioning the state as the developer rather than a guide, frequently overlooking participatory capacities.

Ethics is a philosophical category that transcends boundaries. The fourth element of the evaluations addresses the weaknesses in the ethical framework of the paradigmatic model of rural development within the plans. It is crucial to recognize that

ensuring the integrity of the pathways defined by these paradigmatic standards falls within the realm of ethics. These ethical considerations uphold research projects' credibility, value, and reflective quality about their commitments to rural development. Ethics represents a missing link in the country's literature on rural development planning.

Following the studies of Rasoolimanesh et al. (2013), Azkia & Dibaji Forooshnai (2016), and Momeni (2019), it becomes evident that there has been a significant silence regarding editors' perspectives and the analysis of power dynamics, as researchers frequently invoke "scientific neutrality" to obscure ideological influences. The assumptions underlying these programs are commonly referred to as "gray ethics," aptly describing their approach to ethical issues related to rural development. The claim to impartiality in experimental designs is rooted in a twentieth-century epistemology that separates the learned mind from the phenomena under study, viewing planning as a specialized field that distances planners' knowledge from political influences and power structures.

Research indicates significant shortcomings in rural participation and empowerment and a lack of comprehensive rural development programs. Reliance on oil revenues and a centralized policy-making system complicate effective planning and contribute to imbalances in rural development. These factors highlight the necessity for a coherent strategy aligned with local needs and capacities.

A key aspect that emerged from this study is the necessity of local community participation in projects and processes. In top-down rural

development strategies, local communities often have minimal input and tend to be ignored or marginalized. In contrast, the LEADER approach emphasizes the active role of local communities, which is crucial for project success and long-term sustainability. This involvement fosters greater local residents' awareness of their resources, needs, and potential. The analyzed projects illustrate that local communities contribute significantly through traditional knowledge, skills, and experiences. In many instances, they also provide financial support and serve as project promoters, thereby driving the genuine change processes.

In summary, while minor improvements can be observed in specific programs, these enhancements are often neither systematic nor well-planned, frequently arising from the individual knowledge of practitioners and participatory groups engaged in the planning process. It can be inferred that a primary solution to this stagnation is to revise the perspectives of academic and administrative researchers concerning rural development in Iran, particularly with regard to its territorial culture.

Acknowledgments

The current paper is extracted from the doctoral dissertation of the first author (Ali Mokhtari Karchegani) in Geography and planning, Tarbiat Madras University, Tehran, Iran.

Authors' contributions

The authors equally contributed to the preparation of this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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بازاندیشی توسعه روستایی: تحلیل تقاطع‌های پارادایماتیک در پروژه‌های برنامه‌ریزی فضایی ایران

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۱. مقدمه

طرح‌های آمایش سرزمین، در دهه‌های اخیر، به یکی از کلیدی‌ترین ابزارهای توسعه سرزمینی برای کشورها تبدیل شده است. به نحوی که کشورهای توسعه‌یافته جهت‌گیری‌های کلان ملی خود را بر مبنای این طرح‌ها پایه‌گذاری کرده‌اند. بر همین اساس، بسیاری از توسعه‌گران معتقدند مسیر توسعه روستایی از طرح‌های آمایشی گذر می‌کند. در واقع، این طرح‌های آمایشی هستند که برای روستاهای یک کشور چگونگی به‌فهم درآوردن سازمان فضایی، اولویت‌بندی عملکردی - ساختاری و جهت‌گیری‌های توسعه را تعیین می‌کنند. متن حاضر بر پایه اکتشاف پارادایم فکری توسعه روستایی از درون طرح‌های آمایش سرزمین کشور طراحی شده است. به نحوی که مطالعات صورت گرفته نشان می‌دهد در طول تاریخ توسعه روستایی، سه پارادایم توسعه روستایی برون‌زا، توسعه روستایی درون‌زا و توسعه روستایی نفودرون‌زا حاکم بوده است. هر کدام از این جستارها، پژوهش‌های مختلفی از تفکر توسعه روستایی را بسط می‌دهند که برای فهم آن‌ها لازم است چهار عنصر محوری هستی‌شناسی، معرفت‌شناسی، پراکسیس و اخلاقیات را مورد کنکاش قرار دهیم. در ادامه، وضعیت این چهار عنصر را در مدل پارادایمی توسعه روستایی حاکم در طرح‌های آمایش سرزمین کشور تشریح و مدل پارادایمی مطلوب از نظر محقق ارائه می‌گردد.

۲. روش‌شناسی تحقیق

طراحی استراتژی پژوهش بر مبنای رویکرد آمیخته صورت پذیرفته است؛ این استراتژی مطابق با هدف کلان پژوهش امکان انتخاب

روش‌های چندگانه را فراهم می‌کند. در همین راستا، در گام اول از روش تحلیل محتوای کیفی بهره‌جسته است. این روش برای تفسیر ذهنی محتوای داده‌های متنی از طریق فرآیند طبقه‌بندی کدگذاری، شناسایی مضامین و تشکیل الگوی مفهومی بکار گرفته می‌شود. جمع‌آوری داده‌ها از یک استراتژی ترکیبی استفاده می‌کند که با تحلیل محتوای کیفی داده‌های متنی شروع می‌شود، که با مطالعات اسنادی و پرسش‌نامه‌های متخصص برای اعتبارسنجی تکمیل می‌شود. جامعه آماری پژوهش حاضر شامل طرح‌های آمایش سرزمین استانی که بین سال‌های ۱۳۸۴ تا ۱۴۰۳ در ایران تهیه شده، است. برای انتخاب نمونه‌ها از روش نمونه‌گیری قضاوتی، دسترسی به اسناد و همراه با مشورت از خبرگان دانشگاهی استفاده شده است. روش تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها، مطابق با راهبرد کیفی به کمی تحقیق ابتدا از روش تحلیل محتوای کیفی با بهره‌گیری از نظریه زمینه‌ای سازه‌انگاری، مقوله‌ها و زیر مقوله‌های مدل پارادایمی توسعه روستایی حاکم در طرح‌های آمایش منتخب را استخراج گردید. در گام بعدی، محققان با استفاده از روش مثلث‌بندی (صاحب‌نظران، مجریان، کارشناسان) اقدام به توزیع پرسشنامه‌های اعتبارسنجی کردند که در راستای کمی‌سازی یافته‌های کیفی بود. در نهایت، توزیع فراوانی تظاهرات عناصر مدل پارادایمی توسعه روستایی به تفکیک مناطق سنجیده و با کمک نرم افزار ArcGIS 10 به تصویر کشیده شده است.

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۳. یافته‌های تحقیق

یافته‌ها بر مبنای تحلیل مضمون اسناد آمایش مناطق ۹ گانه منتخب صورت گرفته است. با این حال، برای عمق بخشی به یافته‌های تحقیق از مصاحبه‌های تکمیلی خبرگان دانشگاهی و اجرایی بهره جست. یافته‌های پژوهش، از بین ۴ مضمون و ۱۷ مقوله اصلی کشف شده به عنوان مدل پارادایمی توسعه روستایی واپسگرا در طرح‌های آمایش سرزمین منتخب تحلیل شدند. به طور کلی، میزان پیروی طرح‌های آمایش سرزمین منتخب از مدل پارادایمی توسعه روستایی واپسگرا با امتیاز (۳.۷۳) نشان می‌دهد که علی‌رغم تحولات و اصلاحات «اندیشه‌ای» و «نهادی» همچنان این دیدگاه غلبه دارد. تحلیل یافته‌های به تفکیک مضامین ۴ گانه نشان می‌دهد که در مدل پارادایمی به ترتیب، مضمون «پراکسیس تفریدی» با امتیاز (۳.۹۹) بیشترین تظاهرات را داشته و مضمون «معرفت‌شناسی اثباتی» با امتیاز (۳.۸۳)، مضمون «اخلاقیات خاکستری» با امتیاز (۳.۷۷) و در نهایت مضمون «هستی‌شناسی عینی» با امتیاز (۳.۳۶) با اختلاف کمی سهم کمتری داشته‌اند. همچنین، یافته‌های انباشتی نشان می‌دهد که از مجموع ۲۰ امتیاز تجمعی حاصل از چهار مضمون مدل پارادایمی، طرح آمایش سرزمین استان خوزستان با امتیاز (۱۹.۵) بیشترین و طرح آمایش سرزمین استان تهران با امتیاز (۱۰.۵) کمترین میزان تظاهرات را داشتند. نگاه طرح‌های آمایش سرزمین به توسعه روستایی را می‌توان در یک جمله این‌گونه توصیف کرد که: «خرده پیشرفت‌هایی با حفظ مدل پارادایمی واپسگرا». بدین معنا که آمایشگران از دیدگاه اثباتی به دیدگاه‌های پسااثباتی حرکت کرده‌اند. به نحوی که با کشف رویکرد فلسفی طرح‌ها با زمان تصویب آن‌ها، نشان می‌دهد که دانش ضمنی مجریان و ناظران تهیه طرح‌های آمایشی، به نسبت انباشت علمی در طول زمان از تأثیرگذاری بیشتری برخوردار بوده است.

۴. نتیجه‌گیری

پژوهش حاضر نشان داد که واکاوی مدل پارادایمی به عنوان یک مفهوم فلسفی، می‌تواند راه را برای اندیشه‌ورزی عمیق درباره مسئله توسعه روستایی، به ویژه جایگاه این اندیشه‌ها در طرح‌های آمایشی هموار نماید. در واقع، مدل پارادایمی توسعه روستایی بینشی از بالا به جریان اندیشه‌ورزی است که چشم متفکران روستایی را بر روی جنبه‌های تیره و تاریک روشن می‌کند. با این اوصاف تحلیل مدل پارادایمی، به عنوان یک چارچوب تحلیلی عمیق و دره‌متنیده برای درک جایگاه روستا در طرح‌ها به فهم درآورده شد. همانگونه که نشان دادند؛ برخلاف تصور عامیانه و مکانیکی از طرح‌های آمایش، در حقیقت این طرح‌ها بستر تبلور زیربنایی‌ترین تفکرات فلسفی - علمی آمایشگران کشور محسوب می‌شود که توسط نظام برنامه‌ریزی کلان کشور چارچوب‌بندی و به دست مجریان تدوین می‌گردد. نتایج بیان می‌دارد که بحث توسعه روستایی از نارسایی‌های «اندیشه‌ای» و «اجرایی» در طرح‌ها رنج می‌برد. علی‌رغم اینکه می‌توان خرده پیشرفت‌هایی را در برخی طرح‌ها مشاهده کرد، اما هیچگاه این خرده پیشرفت‌ها به صورت نظام‌مند و برنامه‌ریزی نبوده و اغلب نشأت گرفته از دانش فردی مجریان و گروه همکار در تهیه طرح‌ها بوده است. استنباط می‌شود؛ اصلی‌ترین راه برون رفت از این واماندگی بازخوانی اندیشه‌های آمایشگران (دانشگاهی و اجرایی) نسبت به امر توسعه روستایی ایران متناسب با فرهنگ سرزمینی آن است.

کلید واژه‌ها: الگوی پارادایم غالب، توسعه روستایی، طرح‌های توسعه سرزمین ایران، توسعه قهقرایی، مناطق نه‌گانه.

تشکر و قدردانی

پژوهش حاضر برگرفته از رساله دکتری نویسنده اول (علی مختاری کرچگانی)، گروه جغرافیا و برنامه‌ریزی، دانشگاه تربیت مدرس، تهران، ایران است.

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How to cite this article:

Mokhtari Karchegani, A., Tavakoli, M., Pourtaheri, M. & Navarro Valverde, F.A. (2024). Rethinking rural development: Analyzing paradigmatic intersections in Iran's Spatial Planning Projects. *Journal of Research & Rural Planning*, 13(4), 19-38.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.22067/jrrp.v13i4.2410-1111>

Date:

Received: 12-10-2024

Revised: 28-11-2024

Accepted: 12-12-2024

Available Online: 12-12-2024