The effect of politics on the formation of urban aesthetics, the case of Iran

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ABSTRACT

Urban aesthetics is a complicated issue that needs further evaluation of its physical specifications in a city. This article examines urban aesthetics through the historical political patterns and urban planning and development process. The aim is to reveal the relationship between the formation of urban aesthetics, the urban planning process, and the political impact. Iran as the case of a developing country with a different socio-political context and national system is selected for this aim. Path-dependency analysis has been used as a methodology to provide a framework to understand urban aesthetics followed by different socio-political periods and planning processes. Three political periods have been selected for analysis in which the country gained most of its unprecedented changes in political, and social aspects. Analysis results demonstrated that urban aesthetics is more dependent on the political path dependency than the planning process while still the same planning approaches have been carried out in the country.

1. Introduction

The urban environmental aesthetic is a complex issue that a city should be evaluated beyond its physical characteristics. Especially, a new urban governance model that emerged with global economic relations after the 1970s and the inclusion of different actors in the design and development process has increased its effects on urban aesthetics in recent years (Hawkesworth & Imrie, 2009; Imrie & Street, 2009; Olesen, 2014; Sager, 2011; Stoker, 1998; Vives Miro, 2011). Increasing flexibility in the practice of urban design and planning under neoliberal policies affected urban aesthetics, especially in developing countries, and was the reason for the loss of the identity and unique character of cities. As a result, today's cities have been the subject of criticism for the lack of aesthetic qualities due to the drastic effect of this new urban governance model under the effects of neoliberal policies and priorities (Aşur & Yazici, 2020; Murphy & Fox-Rogers, 2015; Tasan-Kok, 2008; Rezafar & Turk, 2018). On the other hand, urban studies highlight how 'competitiveness' is considered indispensable under neoliberal policies. These policies have led to the reorganization of spaces in cities around the world under the discourse of a city's economic prospects (Karaman, 2013). Increasingly, urban areas become one of the most profitable investment sources, and place marketing strategies have been adopted for the purpose of attracting capital (Kuyucu & Unsal, 2010; Swyngedouw et al., 2002). Such that aesthetic quality has been considered an important subject and gets a central position in the urban planning practice of most post-industrial countries due to not only preserving or enhancing the visual environment or contributing extremely to the image, but also improving public welfare, community satisfaction, and extracted capital returns (Chang, 2014; Gravin & Leroy, 2012, p.6; Chon & Shafer, 2009).

Despite the importance and potential benefits, the implementation of urban aesthetics in cities remains uncertain. This is mainly because conventional legislative instruments (such as building codes, zoning laws, etc.) have little effect on aesthetic control in cities (Punter, 1999; Baer, 1997; Rezafar & Turk, 2021; Imrie & Street, 2009;). On the other hand, public health, safety, harm, prevention, and general welfare are considered necessary aspects of conventional zoning regulations during history.

Moreover, the criticism of the lack of urban aesthetics raises crucial questions: Are path dependencies more important in urban environmental aesthetics in these countries (developing countries) than urban planning and the design itself? What is the effect of political path dependency or urban planning on urban aesthetics? Are they have a direct impact on urban aesthetics? While there is plenty of research on the control of aesthetics in developed and Western European countries such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands (Cerclet, 1999; Schaller, 1999; Nelissen & Vocht, 1991; Nelissen, 2002; Weert, 1999), the researches on urban aesthetics based on the planning systems, and political effects in developing countries are insufficient. Iran is one of these developing countries. There are a few academic kinds of research that discuss the urban planning paradigm, urban management, and the attitude of the government toward planning programs in Iran (Pilehvar, 2020;

Charbgoo & Mareggi, 2020; Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2013; Pilehvar & Kamali, 2010; Farhoodi et al., 2009). Compared to previous studies, this research can be considered a novelty by focusing on a neglected issue of urban aesthetics in a different context of Iranian cities by considering the research's crucial questions. In this scope, Iran is an interesting case in several ways for this research. Iran, a developing country with a top-down planning system and a highly centralized management structure experienced different political periods. The country has a long history of modern urban planning (Shahab et al., 2021).

The process of urban development and planning in Iran is under the supervision of the state. In this scope, the concept of path dependence has been used to analyze planning and policy outcomes for the urban aesthetic in the case of Iran. There are various development plans in Iran from the national to the local levels. Also, aesthetic control has been in legal regulations since the past, and in the present era, it is done with different legal sources. But today's Iranian cities show that the urban aesthetic is still not controlled (Fig. 1). Urban aesthetics seems to have been shaped by the political approach, rather than the influence of planning and design. In other words, dependencies on the path have been shaped according to political periods, which affected urban aesthetics directly. Understanding the correlation between the context and aesthetic legislations during the path dependency can help to do the best integration of urban legislation with aesthetic issues for future contingent events in developing countries. On the other hand, the lessons to be learned from the Iranian case can certainly be considered a turning point for any future scientific research on urban aesthetics control and management system for developing countries, which face the same dynamic development process.

The structure of the paper is as follows: the next section offers a comprehensive literature review related to urban aesthetics. After the research methodology, the case study is outlined in Section 4 within 2 parts, which contain the 'pre-revolutionary from 1925 until 1978' and 'post-revolutionary from 1978 until today' eras. Thus urban aesthetics in the historical political periods through urban legislation, and the urban planning process of the country is analyzed. These analyses give a line of sight for how the situations of different political periods have impacts on urban legal sources and consequences on urban aesthetics. Finally, the discussion and conclusion sections will be described in sequence.

2. Literature review

The first definition of aesthetics belongs to Ahmad Nia and Alpar Atun (2016) as the science that includes feeling and awareness (Ahmad Nia & Alpar Atun, 2016). The conventional definition of aesthetics is beauty, the sense of great, sublime, intense feelings, and art perception (Sternberg, 1991, p.70, Nasar, 1997). According to Teymur (1981: 81) 'aesthetics' is a semantically universal and ubiquitous term. The usual feeling of taste or art is considered aesthetics (Wood & Abe, 2011). The term functions as an adjective to qualify other qualifying terms like

'dimension', 'quality', and 'value'. The definitions, aims, and indicators regarding urban aesthetics differ from one study to another in the literature. Contrary to this variety in the notion, there is a compromise that urban aesthetics is a multidimensional sense. Urban aesthetics is accepted as subjective data beyond quantitative data (Sternberg, 1991). This means the evaluation of urban aesthetics needs to go further into the physical specifications of the city and the consideration of individuals' experiences, as a prominent part of urban quality is required (Pehlivanoğlu, 2011).

Nasar (1997, 150) categorized urban aesthetics as formal and symbolic. According to Nasar (1997), the first characteristic concerns only the construction's forms and is called formal aesthetics. While the second characteristic concerns the human response to the content of forms, which is called symbolic aesthetics. Although urban aesthetics is a multidimensional and complex issue of its own, it is generally evaluated based on the visible representation of an object or a place in a particular urban context, natural setting, land use, traffic and pedestrian flows, the built form, and people's behavioral patterns, structure, well-structured spatial transition, harmony, identity, appropriateness of the composition, and the building's location (Erdoğan, 2006; Mowla, 2011; Rezafar & Turk, 2018; Xianghan, 2008). So, urban aesthetics can be defined as the specific relationship between the urban environments and the buildings, well-formed and harmonious spatial transfer (Mowla, 2011, p.169; Xianghan, 2008, p.63; Erdoğan, 2006, p.72). Which means the evaluation of urban aesthetics on visual and formal aesthetic parameters. King (1997), divided urban aesthetics into two spheres, which are, architectural values and urban aesthetics. According to King (1997), the aesthetic of architecture refers to the physical qualities of buildings and the space around them while urban aesthetics contains an extensive range of subjects. These are criteria, conditions, and values like traffic, economics, and pollution, which play an important role in aesthetic perceptions and have impacts on how persons perceive the city. It can be said that the social and cultural values, which a community brings to the urban areas are among these issues. On the other hand, aesthetics of the plan, aesthetics of proportion, and artistic and social aesthetics are four levels of urban aesthetics according to the literature (Alcock, 1993, cited in Pehlivanoğlu, 2011: 17). So, the plan aesthetics is related to the practical value of the geometrical organizing of forms such as geometrical hierarchies, the proportion aesthetics refers to the reaction of viewers to visual stimuli of high aesthetic quality, artistic aesthetics include the deposition of ideas briefly with a help of urban design, and finally social aesthetics is interests with the subjective scene of place (Rezafar, 2019; Pehlivanoğlu, 2011).

In this scope, the formal and visual aesthetic effects have changed all over history under the affection of exterior events, which have revealed different urban planning and design approaches, especially in developed countries during the 19th century. For example, the remodeling of the 19th-century European industrial city or sustainable spatial environmental planning is an urban planning approach to the Industrial
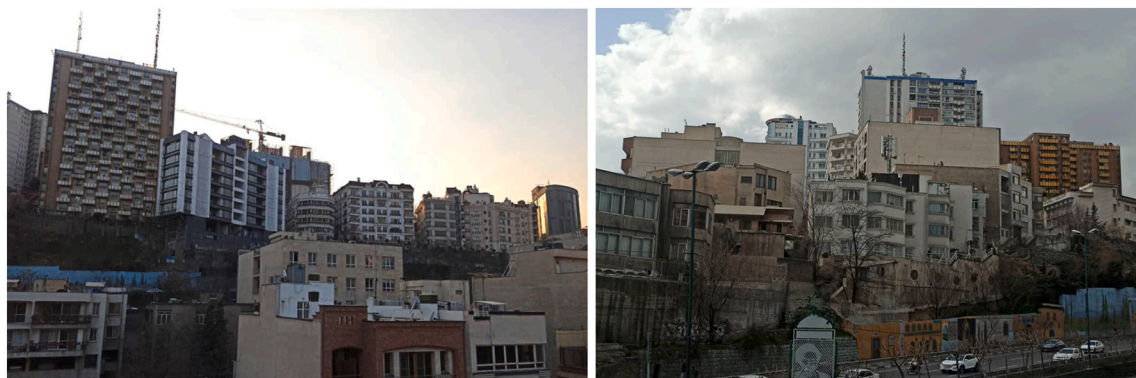

Fig. 1. Parts of Tehran (Iran) silhouette (author's archive).

Revolution and the environmental crises of cities and has also influenced urban aesthetics (Healey, 1993). As aesthetics became a concern, several movements in urban planning and design emerged to counter the worst effects of industrialization. At the end of the 19th century, the change in planning practices in European cities began. The scope of this change was from the opening of streets or the regulation of plans to the artistic principles of design in cities (Hastaoglou Martinidis, 2011). Garden City, Cité Industriel, Camillo Sitte's Picturesque approaches and City Beautiful Movement, (Karakaya, 2010) were among these urban planning and design approaches in developed countries (Fig. 2).

In recent years under the pressure of neoliberal policies with the new model of governance, the effects of conventional legislation devices and urban planning approaches on aesthetic control and management decreased. Various authorized instruments and institutional changes legalize this new form of development, in which the effects can be seen as various large-scale constructions especially in the cities of developing countries (McGuirk, 2005; Swyngedouw et al., 2002; Özalp & Erkut, 2016; Kuyucu & Unsal, 2010). In this model, the urban environment turned into a collective endeavor. So different actors, private agencies and non-governmental institutions are involved in the process of development (Carmona, 2009; Imrie & Street, 2009; McGuirk, 2005; Stoker, 1998; Vives Miro, 2011). As a result, today's cities have been the subject of criticism for the lack of aesthetic qualities.

On the other hand, 'acceptable aesthetic requirements', 'minimum design standards', and 'an aesthetic outlook' are phrases, which still are valid in nearly all building regulations and laws. The importance and necessity for ensuring urban aesthetics can be extracted from these phrases at the same time (Imrie, 2004; Nelissen, 1999). Whereas today's hybrid cities (Ben-Joseph, 2009) are managed from different dimensions such as regulatory (by the state), creative (by designers), and market-driven (by developers) (Brand, 2009; Carmona, 2009; Hawkesworth & Imrie, 2009; Imrie & Street, 2009), which McGill (2001) called it the 'hybrid form of the governance'. Undoubtedly ensuring urban aesthetics in these hybrid cities needs a supplementary legal source for achieving a holistic approach to urban aesthetics, which developed countries such as the Netherlands and Norway are implementing.

Norton (1967, p. 187) argues that there are three possibilities for ensuring urban aesthetics. The simplest rule is to prepare and justify regulations in welfare and health terms. The second is the acceptance of the expansion of police power for aesthetics as the statutory concern of society. Newly, the protection of property values is an acceptable basis for ensuring urban aesthetics that are of judicial interest. Menthe (2010) believes that two broad categories to justify aesthetic regulation exist. The first category is the justifications for natural beauty, safety concerns, traffic, protection of property values, and which is the largest category and called 'content-neutral'. The second is the justifications for the

rights of the community promoting the general welfare (Menthe, 2010, p.229). At the same time, there are four debates in the aesthetic control management area. These are about the role of the government, private and public actors, and sectors in regulating and processing urban aesthetics. The aesthetic policy's body, its scope, the criteria of the evaluation, the assessment process, as well the interest of who is involved in the process, and finally the policy's efficacy, the qualities of the outcomes, and the key integration of success (Punter, 1999, 79) must be considered in the aesthetic control.

Iran as an upper-middle-income economy experiences some different processes in urban development, control, management, and planning since the first Pahlavi era until today. The process of urban development and planning in Iran is under the supervision of the state. On the other hand, neoliberal reforms in developed countries face problems in the incorporation of the Islamic economy of Iran (Torbat, 2020). Economic liberalization reforms in Iran included: the privatization of state-owned affairs, integration in the rates of the exchange, and advancing a free market to lay down the prices of basic goods such as oil products (Torbat, 2020, 121). The egalitarian goals of the Islamic Revolution, the limitations in the constitution, some political parties, and employee organizations manipulating have been the problems in applying the liberalization reforms in Iran. Valadbaygi (2020, 1) believes that a new form of hybrid neoliberalism was established in Iran according to the unfair capitalism growth, international competitiveness as well global capital movements, which drastically have influenced Iranian restructuring, and the conflicts of an emerging internationally-oriented capital fraction. All these reasons reveal that the country is an interesting case in order revealing the place of aesthetics in urban planning and design as well as urban regulations and laws, and the impact of different political periods, as a developing country.

3. Research method

The method used in this analysis is Path Dependence. As discussed before path dependency method is used to reveal the correlation between political periods and urban aesthetics with this hypothesis that urban aesthetics is more dependent on the political path dependency than on the planning or design itself, especially in developing countries like Iran.

Path dependence as a simple definition means the ongoing and future events such as actions, states, and decisions, which depend on the path of the previous ones (Yılmaz Bakır, 2020; Page, 2006). In other words, a little beginning or minor random shocks along the path lead to altering the way of history (Page, 2006, p.87). Mahoney (2000, p.507) argues what path dependence is like, traces past historical events, and also shows what these events are and how contingent occurrences
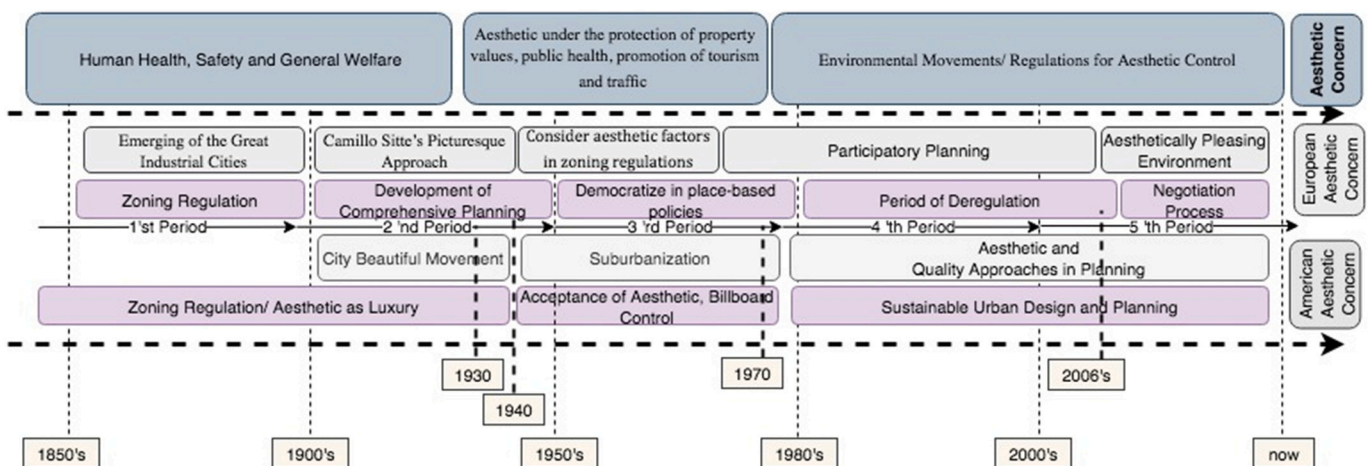

Fig. 2. Urban aesthetics regarding the urban planning and design approaches in developed countries.

themselves. The concept emphasizes that 'history matters' or 'the past events' influence the future, in other words, path-dependent outcomes improve as a result of the system's self-history (Mahoney, 2000; Martin & Sunley, 2006; Pierson, 2000). Path dependency opinion focuses on the structures that impose organizations, rather than how decision-makers form organizational development. Provisional milestones, called critical junctions, emphasize the transfer from path dependency to new path generation (Morrison & Croucher, 2010). A critical juncture represents a choice between two or more options and is characterized by some kind of conditionality in which an unforeseen event is effective (Booth, 2011; Mahoney, 2000). The path dependence notion, and critical junctures, can help to recognize how institutions endure change and how to manage changes to adapt to the evolving process in a better way (Low et al., 2005). These notions indicate that political rationalities are restricted in institutional laws and regulations as well as in the mental models of the minds, which are responsible for the definition of the problem (Low et al., 2005). According to Lee (2012), institutional changes have occurred under the influence of policy interventions even if due to institutional malaise the changes don't happen as rapidly as expected. He believes that the reflective reaction of the actors changed policy, which results in institutional changes. In other words, policy intervention due to various factors can lead to both unlocking the path dependence as well dependence on the path again (Lee, 2012; Tasan Kok, 2015). In the area of city governance, the path dependency concept shows how city governments can engage in suboptimal policies when their future outcomes are uncertain. This can be explained by the fact that many policy subsystems tend to be locked into organizational configurations and collective action patterns over time, although policy contains some unexpected elements and chances that are evident in strategic behavior and agent choice (Woodlief, 1998; Conteh & Panter, 2017). Thus, unexpected consequences can occur as a result of the policy's intervention, which comes at any stage and everywhere, and in different ways. While in terms of political and policy processes path dependence concept must able to identify those who benefit from a particular institution and support its continuity or will struggle with a change that puts them at a disadvantage (Sorensen, 2015, p.9).

So, the concept of path dependency can be a good identifier to comprehend the relationship between urban aesthetics, and urban planning processes or political periods. This research will use the terms of critical juncture and turning points regarding a path-dependent model, which comprises different socio-political situations, legal sources, and institutional changes in the scope of urban planning and design. It describes a gradual critical juncture to test the impact of path dependency (political situations) on urban aesthetics by focusing on the case of Iran.

4. Urban aesthetics in the path analysis of Iran's urban planning and design history

Dr. Abbas Akhondi, Transportation and Urban Development Minister of Iran in his time presented a description of the city in which we live, at a conference entitled 'Iranian Islamic Identity' in Architecture and Urban Planning', which was held at the University of Tehran in May 2015,

> "When you walk in the city, it is as if the buildings are slapping you and, they have ridiculed your whole identity and being. Tradespeople and several business executives have traded all of their spiritual heritage and biological resources to me and, all future generations. While they continue this trade.
> The movement in the city is slow. There are many obstacles in the movement of capital goods and people in the city…. Thus, unfortunately, the unhappiness of our Iranian cities, has gradually given way to the existence of commodities everywhere."

(Setavin, 2020)

What is remarkable about this description of the Iranian cities is that they grow and developed unidentified without spiritual and historical

heritage, aesthetics, and identity. At the same time, it reveals the tenuous position of the authorities involved in planning and design areas, and maybe the ethical dilemmas they face.

Iran as an ancient civilized country is an exceptional case that displays a long history of modern urban planning, which dates back to the 1920s. Although Iran has historically been a powerful country its political, social, and economic spheres have witnessed a great change during the Pahlavi era until today. Increasing concentration of power and state system, the white revolution (Enghelabe Sefid), the coup d'etat of 28 August 1953, a rapid transition from a traditional civil society to a modern society from the first Pahlavi era and suffered Islamic Revolution and war (Iran-Iraq war), the implementation of development programs, and the increase of economic and cultural exchanges with the west were some examples of these changes that also, the urban governance formation influenced by, and had spatial and aesthetics consequences. On the other hand, a country with a top-down planning system has a highly centralized management structure (Alvanchi et al., 2021; Shahab et al., 2021), and urban aesthetics was not a distinct issue in its planning system.

4.1. Urban aesthetics and planning system in the pre-revolutionary era

4.1.1. First Pahlavi Era (1925–1941)

The beginning of the First Pahlavi age coincided with the progress of the artistic planning approach and the formation of democratic and modern governments of European countries in the early twentieth century (Zerkesh, 2009). Governing the country by a powerful centralized government with a tendency to modernity and imitation of the west marked a turning point and trajectory of Iran's governance model (Aghaeimehr & Gharebaghlou, 2020; Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2013; Ziari, 2006). Modernization and social transformation of Iran accelerated from the first Pahlavi until the late second Pahlavi period (Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2013). The approach of modernization and nationalism, which replaced instead of localism and ethnic identity, had emerged since the First World War employing 'Autocratic Control', which was a symbol of development in this period (Raassi, 2011). Creating homogenous citizens within a homogenous nation-state was the purpose of this approach (Raassi, 2011, 14).

Tehran as the capital of Pahlavi had an important position for the leaders and was the most affected city and became the center of regulation and coordination of all affairs. The spatial effects of these changes create the appearance of renovation projects, the construction of public buildings, industrial buildings, machines, offices, street systems, and road networks as well increase in the size and population of Tehran (Talebi et al., 2015; Zerkesh, 2009). These new functions and land-use types emerged following the western development plans without proper planning and based on modernization not just in Tehran but in other cities of the country (Mashhadi Moghaddam & Rafieian, 2020; Ziari, 2006). With these constructions, which lasted up to the 1948s without any national, regional, or urban planning, the organic city form-especially the capital city Tehran- changed to a modern and industrial city (Ebrahimpour Masoumi, 2011; Ziari, 2006). This was while there was not any prepared master plan for the city more than a street map in 1930 (Fig. 3)(Mashhadi Moghaddam & Rafieian, 2020).

Despite more western indications, the cities of this period were hybrid of western and eastern elements and an international style of urbanism (Ebrahimpour Masoumi, 2011). This was another spatial effect of this political period. As well it was the first time that foreign architects and urban planners had been invited for designing the cities of Iran (Jafari & Hein, 2020). Besides, the government had a combined approach to the socialism–capitalist system and attempted to transform Iran's community toward a consumption and service society (Pilehvar & Kamali, 2010). The tendency of westernization led to the initiation of new institutions with new policies and regulations in the field of urban planning. These institutional changes started with spatial planning initiatives in the cities and were strengthened by the 1933s Law on
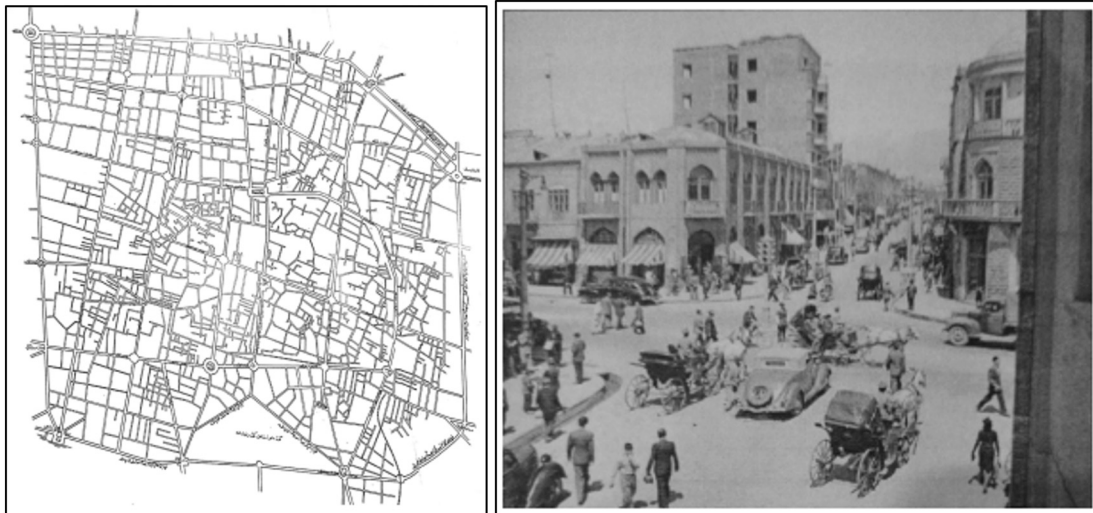
Fig. 3. A) Development plan of Tehran in 1937, construction of right-angle streets without attention to the historical, traditional and aesthetic features of the old city, B) One of these streets in Tehran as the dominant part of the city in 1945 (Lalezar Street) (Pourzargar et al., 2021, p.10–12).

Construction and Development of Roads. The law had 10 articles and was the first law in the field of urban spatial arrangement and development. Thus, the first regulation in urban planning and architecture belongs to the first Pahlavi era. The Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice were in charge of implementing this law. In the case of urban aesthetic control and management, according to the first article of the act, the municipality could develop or construct a square or street for ensuring the aesthetic of the city. As well as if there was a ruined Land or building inside the city, which conflicted with the cleanliness and aesthetic of the city the municipality had the authority to build a wall or a building incompatible with its surrounding walls (Majlis 92834, 2020). Development of the roads and street systems, construction of public parks, national gardens, green spaces, and avoiding decorating and the use of pure geometric volumes were regulatory issues that indirectly related to urban aesthetics. Demolition and renovation was the main approach of the government in this period. Other legal and institutional arrangements of the First Pahlavi era, which indirectly related to urban aesthetics, were; Establishment of the National Antiquities Preservation Association (1921), the hiring of foreign architects and archaeologists (1925–1931), and The Law on Preservation of National Artifacts and Antiquities (1930) (Aghaeimehr & Gharebaghlou, 2020). So, the political approach of the First Pahlavi was toward the destruction of historical and Qajar textures by the construction of streets and new phenomena. Together, urban design introduced new aspects of urban visual characteristics in this period. Façade design principles such as order, rhythm, symmetry, and synchrony are considered in façade designs. The period's effective measures, which at the same time had visual effects and led to vistas production, were emphasizing the corners and the creation of symmetry around squares (Raassi, 2011, 49) (Fig. 4).

4.1.2. Second Pahlavi Era (1941–1978)

In this period, Iran suffered fundamental changes in the socio-political, economic, and cultural structure due to several key factors. The new king, after ascending, had programs for supremacy, and self-government to reach the maximum potential of Iran's historical lands and raise the Iranian nation to the level of contemporary civilizations in the world (Raassi, 2011, 53). The gradual shift from agriculture to industry, the government's oil revenues, and consideration the oil and gas as new resources for economic development, trade improvements with the other countries from the Persian Gulf, and the rapid urban population growth, established a new era for the cities. The formation of Iranian cities and architecture, as well as people's lifestyles, was influenced by these factors and the growth of modernity. While the main attitude of the government was toward protection and urban regeneration toward continuity of unity in urban identity. The government of the second Pahlavi started to reconstruct and protection of historical monuments due to emphasis on the preservation of cultural heritage (Aghaeimehr & Gharebaghlou, 2020). At the same time, the urban guidance plan was considered as the short-term planning approach for the cities without comprehensive planning by the government (Mashhadi Moghaddam & Rafieian, 2020). However, it did not enter into force ever.

Five National Development Plans were prepared between 1948 and

Fig. 4. A) Railway station of Tehran (1936) (Mirzahosseini et al., 2019, p.66), B) Judicial palace of Tehran (First Pahlavi) (Mirzahosseini & Soltanzadeh, 2021, p.71).

1979. The gradual shift from agriculture to industry, transportation, and communication, large-scale, prestigious, and high-cost projects-including dams, airports, main railways, highways, ports, and tele-communications, as well as gas and oil platforms were the emphasis subjects of all these plans. All these issues had spatial and aesthetic affections in urban areas. Foreign consultant engineers collaborated on these plans (Fig. 5). The first Seven-Years Development Plan Bill (Sanad-Barnameh-Haftsaale-Tosee) was enacted by the Cabinet in 1948. A new supreme planning board, in other words, the plan organization (Shoray-Aali Barnamehrizi) was appointed in November 1947 by the government, to submit their recommendations to the Cabinet. The 'Plan Organization' was the Iranian first modern urban planning organization. Until the Islamic Revolution, the board became a technocratic headquarter of Iran and produced two seven-year plans and three five-year plans for the development of the country. It played a key role in the planning practice of the country, which at the same time linked the political elite and experts to international authorities and agencies (Mashayekhi, 2018, p.2, Javadi, 2017).

On the other hand, the urban system of the country-influenced by capitalist relations since 1960 (Fanni, 2006). Land Reform Program (Barnameh-e-Eslahaat-e-Arzi), which was introduced in the early 1960s and implemented in three phases between 1962 and 1972, was another important implementation with spatial effects in this period. Land Reform Program (LRP) was the root of urbanization and urban population growth. Whereas the program aimed to distribute land that belonged to large landowners, the royal family, and the people among the villagers (Javadi, 2017, p.10). Consequences of the Land Reform Program were political instability, fragmentation of the lands and rural degradation, transferring labor and farmers to urban areas or rural-urban migration with its social and economic outcomes, increased slums around the big cities, lack of needed houses, and urban infrastructures. Also, rising a new form of land speculation at the edges of the cities was another effect of the program (Javadi, 2017; Mashayekhi, 2018). The capital city of Tehran was most exposed to these changes. The city faced the second type of planning in the 1960s, which saw the preparation of plans to regulate and manage future change. The size and complexity of the city had grown so much that its spatial management needed additional tools, resulting in an increasingly complex municipal organization and the preparation of a comprehensive plan for the city (Madanipour, 2006).

Some institutional and legal arrangements had been done in this period, to plan intervention in the cities, which had spatial and aesthetic effects too. To create focus and coordination in the preparation and implementation of programs and plans, urban and rural development plans, and construction and provision of housing, the Ministry of Development and Housing was established in 1963 (Majlis 95489, 2020). The heading of the ministry changed to The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development in 1973. While, the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, which roots back to the 1920s during the monarchy of Nasser al-Din Shah was leadership for the management and monitoring of the urban development plans (including comprehensive and detailed plans). In this scope, the Master plan of Tehran, the capital city of Iran envisioned in 1965 by the central planning institution through the constellation of a foreign planner Victor Gruen as well as Iranian architecture and local planners (Jafari & Hein, 2020). This planning trend is called as transnational planning approach. The aim was to make Tehran, the 'showcase of modernization' (Jafari & Hein, 2020, p.3; Mashayekhi, 2015). Along with the management of land expenditure in Tehran, this plan encouraged the flow of population to the periphery and thus the marginalization, in other words, socio-spatial segregation of the urban poor (Dadashpoor & Ghazaie, 2019). The definition of some standards like the minimum land separation of 300 m^2, which weren't affordable for the poor was another reason for this socio-spatial segregation (Dadashpoor & Ghazaie, 2019).

Consequently, the Law on the Establishment of the Supreme Council of Architecture and Urban Planning of Iran was enacted in 1973 (Asemanabi, 2020, Majlis 96910, 2020). The law had the purposes of creating a better environment for people, promoting the art of Iranian architecture, observing different styles of traditional and national architecture as well as presenting its criteria and original aspects by considering new scientific and technical methods with paying attention to climatic conditions and lifestyle and local requirements. So, the emphasis on qualitative issues in urban areas is seen in the purposes of the law. Although the urban design and qualitative issues were considered in the comprehensive planning of the cities during the late of this period, the council mostly has been focused on physical planning and quantitative dimensions of urban planning until today (Roosta and Ghasepour, 2019).

4.2. Urban aesthetics and planning system in the post-revolutionary era

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, extensive changes occurred in the country due to the values of the revolution to replace the monarchy with a state, which uneasily combined the rule of the clergy with parliamentary republicanism. Including Islamic ideology in the new constitution's body as well as social, economic, and cultural policies was important. The main goal was to eradicate poverty and significantly reduce regional disputes (Alaedini & Yeganeh, 2021; Javadi, 2017). According to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, article 4, all civil, criminal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be by Islamic standards. This principle governs all articles of the constitution and other laws and regulations. The determination of such compatibility
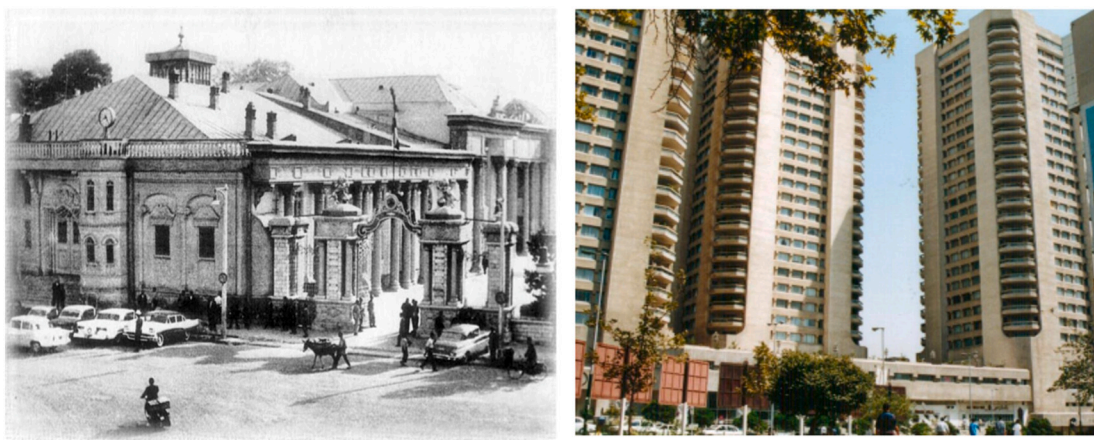

Fig. 5. A) The National Consultative Assembly of Iran (the late 60s) (Javadi, 2017, p.20) B) The late second Pahlavi Era's Constructed Buildings, Tehran (Raassi, 2011, p. 50).

is left to the Foqaha of the Guardian Council (Wipo, 2020). While revolutionary organizations established such as the Foundation of the Oppressed (Bonyad-e-Mostazafan), Reconstruction Jihad (Jahad-e-Sazandegi), and above all the Housing Foundation of the Islamic Revolution (Bonyad-e-Maskan-e-Enghelab-e-Eslami) (Javadi, 2017). Islamic ideology changed the urban systems in the country. Traditional connections between cities and villages were overthrown after the revolution and exacerbated after the war with Iraq (Fanni, 2006). The consequences of this situation were population growth (from 33.7 million to 79.9 million between 1976 and 2016), increasing economic and social disparities, and inequalities in cities or between cities and villages (Fanni, 2006, Alaedini & Yeganeh, 2021, p.2). Depending on these conditions urbanization rate increased from 47 % to 74 % between 1976 and 2016 (Alaedini & Yeganeh, 2021, p.2). Furthermore, the new town establishment policies were taken into consideration from 1989 to 1993, with the aim of preventing unplanned urban expansion. Even though the goal was not achieved (Dadashpoor & Ghazaie, 2019).

In the scope of urban design and planning some new institutional and legal arrangements have been done, which affect urban features as well as aesthetics directly or indirectly after the revolution until today. While the term 'urban design' was first used in urban rules and regulations in 1989. The main organization with the aim of managing and monitoring the urban development plans (including master and detailed plans) and preparing guidelines, related to urban management is the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development (Vezarat-e Rah ve Shahrsazi) (Javadi, 2017). The collection of Regulations and Approvals of the Supreme Council of Urban Planning and Architecture of Iran (2017) contains some of these regulations. These regulations and their content, which are directly or indirectly related to urban aesthetics are as follows. Rules and regulations for the city façade that enacted in 1990. According to this regulation, the facades of the buildings, which are located in the passages, need to be aesthetically and harmoniously displayed with high-quality materials. The main and side facades of the building are subject to the completion of construction licenses. These rules and regulations about the harmonized facades are necessary for all cities, which have comprehensive plans, detailed plans, and guidance plans. Rules and regulations of Iranian-Islamic architecture and urban planning were enacted in 1996. According to this regulation, the mosque as a central landmark of cities should be considered in all plans. The necessity of bicycle path design in detailed plans to reduce air pollution, was enacted in 2008. The most effective regulation in urban design and consequently urban aesthetics is the Rules and Regulations for Increasing and Improving the Quality of Appearance and Urban Landscape that were enacted in 2008. This regulation is one of the most important approvals of the High Council of Architecture and Urban Development with urban design. The aims of the regulation are, clearing and improving the urban features and landscape, flooring of passages and sidewalks, and organizing the urban landscape with considering the health and welfare of the citizens. This regulation indicates a review of the council's attitude to the specialized concepts in the field of urban design and the place of this field in the documents of urban development and guidance (Roosta and Ghasepour, 2019). For implementing the aims of this regulation, the Urban Appearance Landscape Quality Improvement Committee was appointed. The general rules of this regulation are; the necessity of human scale, as well as morphological design for the historical areas, the need for recycling and cleaning materials, as well as local materials, determining the form, scale, and location of the panels and boards by the committee, prohibition of overhanging the buildings such as balcony or terrace, and the construction of a semi-open space will be provided by the retreat of the external walls from the ground. At the same time, designers are obliged to design and execute the standard of buildings located at the intersection of passages in a way that leads to improving the visual quality of intersections. New buildings should be in harmony with surrounding buildings in form, material color, and morphology. On the other hand, a comprehensive document for improving the quality of appearance and urban landscape (2011) was approved by the High

Council of Architecture and Urban Development. This document aims to create a superior document for the realization of the Islamic Iranian city, improve the quality of citizens with the blessing of God, and keep in order the urban design issues by taking into account the area's natural cultural and historical features. According to this document, the identical buildings and symbols of the city's history and culture, natural symbols like the forest, the mountain, and the sea, the characteristical street of the city such as ceremonial and administrative squares, religious paths, geometry, and calculations that can be counted from the collection of historical and cultural buildings and textures, the amount and ratio of openings such as doors and windows general shape of materials and how to combine components, native wildlife and plants are important examples of the urban landscape and appearance. Iranian-Islamic architecture is the focus of this document so all comprehensive plans of the cities will be revised according to the articles of this document. The document has articles with the aim of retrieving the identity of Iranian Islamic architecture, which indirectly affects urban spatial aesthetics. These are the characteristics of the general physical-spatial structure of the city, building height system (Fig. 6), occupancy and emptiness, movement system and accesses based on pedestrian priority, principles of the centrality of the mosque, organizing the axis of vision to the optimal views of visual corridors, general shape, and form of buildings concerning the characteristics of Iranian Islamic architecture.

Another aspect of Iranian urban aesthetics in this period is the construction of Maskan-e Mehr buildings, which is done by the government with the 99-year transfer of government lands (Wipo, 2020). With the Mehr housing policies, the role of the non-governmental sectors was enhanced in housing construction (Dadashpoor & Ghazaie, 2019). This project did not provide for the needs of the poor comprehensively, due to the construction in inappropriate locations with a lack of facilities and infrastructures (Dadashpoor & Ghazaie, 2019; Zarghamfard et al., 2020). While the price of houses has increased during the last decades (Gholipour, 2020). At the same time, new techniques and methods in modern building construction, which jointly shape the townscape of metropolitan cities like Tehran, affect the visual-physical and aesthetic features of the cities. Janipour (2006, 40) called this process, the transformation from an introvert traditional to an extrovert modern style in architectural design. According to him, since the existing regulations especially regarding building facades are incomplete and do not have to be enforced, visual irregularity can be seen in the cities. There isn't any emphasis on the subjects such as identity, aesthetics, meaning, compatibility with the environment, and so on in the context of comprehensive and detailed plans and regulations (Nasr & Majedi, 2013). As well as, the intervention of the community in designing the façade and, the insignificance of the façade in regulations affect urban visual and aesthetic features (Nasr & Majedi, 2013).

4.3. Urban legal sources, and institutional change in the political path dependency of Iran

Iran has taken a centralized or traditional and top-down planning attitude despite other changes during political regimes until today (Mashhadi Moghaddam & Rafieian, 2020; Shahab et al., 2021). Three political regimes or critical junctures (Fig. 7) caused diverse organizational and institutional processes in Iran (Table 1). Fig. 7, reveals three main indicators 1) actors, 2) legal sources and 3) external events along with these political regimes, which are the sequences of important turning points in the urban aesthetics. The figure shows that the change of political regimes defines the path for changing legal sources and institutional structures in urban planning areas with less concern for urban aesthetics. The political regime in the country shifted from Qajar to the Pahlavi dynasty at the beginning of 1925's. The new regime led to two transformations in Iran: industrial transformation, modernization, and social transformation. The 1925s marked a turning point in Iran's social transformation toward modernization, which was imposed by the central government. It also marked a turning point in the urban planning

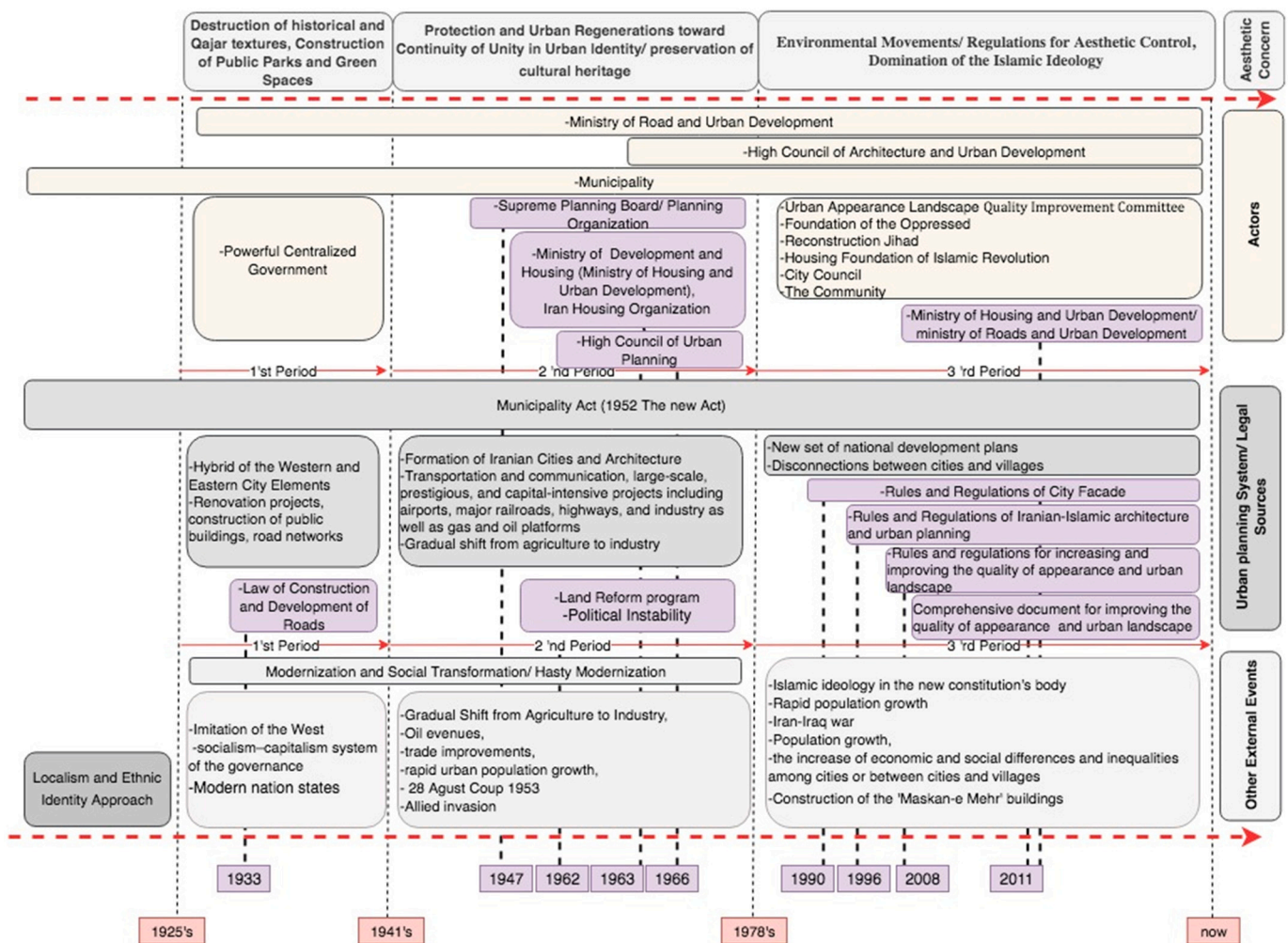**Fig. 6.** New textures of the Iranian cities (personal archive).

Fig. 7. Effective actors, legal sources, and other external events within different political periods for urban aesthetics, Iran case.

system and affected the structure of urban governance with related legal sources. Since then, the powerful central government started to construct modern western city elements such as road networks under the law of Construction and Development of Roads. Although, the municipality Act as the very first law document for city management, was (and still is) forced into the urban management system. The situation influenced architecture by combining traditional Iranian architecture and national identity with European architectural methods

Table 1

Policy trends, urban planning and design systems, and spatial aesthetic effects in the political path dependency of Iran.

Policy trends/ critical junctures	Political context	Urban aesthetics		Spatial aesthetical effects
		Influential legal source	Institutional and organizational Structure	
1. First Pahlavi Period (1925–1941)	- Centralism in politics and economics - Modernization and Social Transformation - Architects educated in Europe and Hiring foreign architects - Administrative centralization, modernization of the army, expansion of bureaucracy - Creating National ıdentity - Opening of Tehran university	- Construction and Development of Roads Act -Municipality Act	- Municipality - Central government - Ministry of Interior-Ministry of Justice	- Following the western development plans - Hybrid of the Western and Eastern Elements - Removal of the city walls and demolishing old gates - The most significant changes in contemporary architecture in the scope of buildings' façade and form. - Building the new large-scale urban infrastructure (Tehran) - Widespread road-widening schemes, which make them accessible to motor vehicles.
2. Second Pahlavi Period (1941–1978)	- Architects educated in Europe - Establishment of Tehran Faculty of Fine Arts - Nationalized Iranian Oil Industry - Allied invasion - Land Reform Program - White Revolution (Enghelab-e Sefid) - The 1953 Coup dé tat - The second world War - Population growth - Rural-Urban migration - Quasi-capitalist system - Marginalization of the urban poor	- Municipality Act - Establishment of the Municipality and City Council Act - The Law for Establishing High Council of Architecture and Urban Planning of Iran - National Development Plans	- Municipality - High Council of Urban planning - Plan Organization - Ministry of Development and Housing - Ministry of Roads and Urban Development - High Council of Architecture and Urban Development	- Growing the cities in all directions - Destroying suburban gardens and green spaces - Creating a better environment for people, promoting the art of Iranian architecture, observing different styles of traditional and national architecture
3. Islamic Revolution Period (1979-now)	- The Influence of Western Pluralist Postmodern Thoughts - Cultural Revolution - Iran-Iraq war - Socialist system	- National Development plans - Rules and regulations of the city façade - Islamic Revolution Housing Foundation - Comprehensive document for improving the quality of appearance and urban landscape	- Reconstruction Jihad - Housing Foundation of Islamic Revolution - High Council of Architecture and Urban Development - City Council	- Diversity, pluralism and Eclecticism in Architectural Style - The mosque is a central landmark of cities - Clearing and improving the urban features and landscape, flooring of passages and sidewalks, organizing of the urban landscape with considering health and welfare for the citizens

(Hasangholinezhad Yasoori & Hoseinzadeh, 2019; Madanipour, 2006). Foreign architects were employed in this period. So, in the scope of the urban aesthetic, this period was a hybrid of the western and eastern city elements.

Another important era in the country, which affected urban aesthetics through several new legal sources and institutions, was political tensions during the second Pahlavi period. With high birth rates and the intensification of rural-urban migration, together with the land reforms of the 1960s large cities grew. The formation of the High Council of Urban planning (Shoraye Alie Shahrsazi) in 1966 marked a turning point in modern urban planning in Iran. Formulating planning regulations and policies, and providing comprehensive (master) plans for major cities were among the duties of this council (Vista, 2020; Iran Heritage, 2020). After the 1960s the formation of Iranian architectural styles was influenced by the government's oil revenue, and development plans. The construction of the public and private sectors became popular with the help of rich oil money, which caused the production of different types of architectural styles such as modern style, international style, regional-oriented architecture, and cooperative constructions (Sebat Sani, 2013).

The Islamic revolution and winning the leadership by the traditionalists is another effective turning point in the urban aesthetics of the country. Several changes were introduced to impose Islamic rules and regulations in all aspects of management. According to Madanipour (2006), urban development in this period shows the attitude and preference of the revolutionary government for modernization too. The long war with Iraq caused starting of the normalization and construction period and affected the urban planning and design system. Comprehensive (master) planning still is a dominant paradigm of planning in Iran. As well, the council-manager model formed the basis of Iranian city management (Safavi, 2018). All the political trends, urban laws and

regulations, and institutional structures reveal that urban planning and design in cities of Iran is fragmented and more centralized, while different formal and informal institutions and organizations are involved in the urban planning process. Lack of coordination and cross-sectoral cooperation in relevant agencies, lack of specific design policies in the field of urban planning, and weakness in public participation are among the most problems in this area. Compared to developed countries the aesthetic issue isn't considered in theory even practice of urban planning in the developing country of Iran and there isn't any national legislation for urban aesthetics.

5. Discussion

The socio-political history of Iran proves that changing political and social even economic circumstances on both national and international levels have caused the change in the formation of urban aesthetics in the last century. As discussed in the research, urban aesthetics have firmly been under the influence of the political path dependency of the periods.

According to Conteh (2017, p.4) the developments of pathways represent the policy feedback mechanisms, which besides the critical junctures are part of the path-dependence occurrence. The findings of this analysis (Table 1) demonstrate that urban aesthetics in Iran depends more on political situations than urban planning processes. Since Iran continues the same top-down practice in planning and design systems under the new political and urban texture before and after the revolution. Whereas, urban aesthetics in the cities of the country has not remained the same.

In this scope, evaluating urban aesthetics in critical junctures during the three political periods illustrated the policy tendencies toward western implementations during the first two periods. An important

change in urban aesthetics is seen to have started during the term after the Islamic revolution. The urban aesthetic attitude during the previous two political periods of the Pahlavi dynasty was quite limited and focused more on the westernization of the country. The difference is that the first Pahlavi had destruction based while the second Pahlavi had preservation-based applications. Such that, the destruction of historical and Qajar textures and the construction of streets during the first Pahlavi era, and the construction of public buildings and new functions and land use types during the second Pahlavi era, were both a kind of policy approach to westernization project in the country. Even the 'Plan Organization' was established and played a key role in the planning practice of the country during the second Pahlavi era, but it was linked to the political elite and made decisions in line with their considerations. The significant problem in this planning is that the stakeholders do not have the right to participate at any stage due to the unclear and not properly explained way of participation. Vice versa demands and decisions of the central government are an unchangeable basis (Farhoodi et al., 2009). So, a sequence of national development plans during the second Pahlavi era was the continuation of the European version of modernity programs in the non-western context of Iran (Mashayekhi, 2015). The new modern urban form and lifestyle of the cities sped up with revenues of nationalized oil and laissez-faire economic policy in light of the comprehensive planning approach. On the other hand, inflexibility and lack of transparency in this kind of planning, which imposes personal opinion and taste in the design process, were replaced with a strategic planning approach under the neoliberalism economic era in developed countries. After the Islamic Revolution, Islamic standards were placed at the center of all aspects of management, and the determination of such compatibility was left to the Foqaha of the Guardian Council (Wipo, 2020). For urban management and consequently urban aesthetics, different ways were used together in the scope of revolutionary organizations such as the Housing Foundation of the Islamic Revolution (Bonyad-e-Maskan-e-Enghelab-e-Eslami). While comprehensive (master) planning still is a dominant paradigm of planning in Iran. This top-down approach in the planning system with a powerful centralized government in Iran does not integrate with different aspects of urban development such as socio-cultural dimension and participating role. Hybrid urbanization, which is a combination of western and Islamic features can be seen in the cities. So they ignore sustainable urban development and urban aesthetics. So, the legal sources, as well as the plans, fail as a strategy and tool for guiding and ensuring urban aesthetics.

So in order to provide urban aesthetics in developing countries, comprehensive research on urban legal sources and the historical context of the cities is needed.

6. Conclusion

The lack of urban aesthetics in the cities has been criticized in recent years, especially with the influence of neoliberal priorities and policies. Although many studies have been conducted in the field of urban aesthetics in developed countries such as Norway, the Netherlands, and France, the evaluation of urban aesthetics in developing countries has received less attention. In this study, two goals were evaluated. First, this article sought to develop an analytical framework to systematically investigate the transformation of urban aesthetics during the process of urban development in different political eras. Second, describing the phenomenon of urban aesthetics in a selected developing country and testing whether political path dependence can expand the understanding of complex political processes in these countries within the scope of urban aesthetics. Urban planning and design processes and related legal sources illustrate the complex political situation associated with the turning points in the case study. In the end, the process of urban aesthetics in this research depicts an adaptive process in political periods instead of urban planning and the design itself due to the interaction between local, national, and international signs in socio-political situations.

Although urban aesthetics is an important issue in developed countries and the complementary devices of urban aesthetics are preferred in planning systems, in developing countries this issue has not yet received sufficient attention. There was, and still is, a little attempt to provide a systematic and legitimate urban aesthetic in cities. Understanding the relationship between political situations, urban planning systems, and urban aesthetics, especially for countries like Iran that are under the pressure of a powerful central government, political system, and top-down approach in the planning system, provides a practical legal resource, which can create a routine by giving importance to urban beauty and be useful for design.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Declaration of competing interest

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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