

Failing Regeneration, Displacement, and Continued Consequences on Future Urban Planning Processes in Distressed Neighborhoods in Tehran

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Abstract : Displacement, local discontent, and forced exclusion have become prominent parts of urban regeneration activities in the Global North and South. This paper discusses the processes of massive displacement and neighborhood alteration as the consequences of a large-scale political/ideological placemaking project in central Tehran that transformed people's daily lives in surrounding neighborhoods. The conversion of Imam Hussein Square and connecting 17-Shahrivar Street to a pedestrian plaza in 2016 resulted in adjacent neighborhoods' physical, social, and economic degradation. The project has downgraded the economic and social characteristics of urban life in surrounding neighborhoods, commercialized residential land uses, displaced local people and businesses, and created unprecedented housing modes. This research has been conducted in two stages; first, after the project's implementation between 2017-2018, and second, when the street was reopened after local protests in 2021. In the first phase, 50+ on-site interviews were organized with planners, managers, and dwellers about the decision-making processes, design, and project implementation. We find that the project was based on the immediate political objectives and top-down power exertion of the local government in creating exclusive spaces (for religious ceremonies) without considering locals' knowledge, preferences, lifestyles, and everyday interactions. In the continued research in 2021, we utilized data gathered in facilitation activities and several meetings and interviews with local inhabitants and businesses to explore, design, and implement initiatives for bottom-up planning in these neighborhoods. The top-down and product-oriented (rather than process-oriented) planning, dependency on municipal financing rather than local partnerships, and lack of public participation proved to have continued effects on local participation. The paper concludes that urban regeneration projects must be based on the participation of different private/public actors, sustainable financial resources, and overall social and spatial analysis of the peripheral area before interventions.

Keywords : displacement, urban regeneration, distressed neighborhoods, ideological placemaking, Tehran

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