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Resaech Paper

The Critical Review of Urban Planning's Disciplinary and Professional Status in Iran: A survey among practitioners and graduates

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Abstract
This study presents a critical examination of the status of urban planning as a discipline and profession. The study is comprised of two main sections. The first is a theoretical review of various selective related studies conducted in English-speaking countries, focusing on those from the United Kingdom and the United States. The second is a survey of 61 professional and graduate urban planners in Iran, which was conducted using a non-probability sampling method. The most significant variables examined are the essential skills and competencies of planners, the inclination to pursue the same field of study once more, and the discrepancy between academic education and professional training. In conclusion, the theoretical and survey-based findings are interpreted from sociological, epistemological, and political economy perspectives, and recommendations are provided. This study is distinctive in its use of an interpretive approach to quantitative and qualitative findings, as well as its combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to achieve a form of causality in the issues of the field and profession of planning.

Keywords: *Planning education, Interdisciplinarity, Planning discipline, Planning core curriculum.*

INTRODUCTION

Wildovsky's (1973) claim regarding planning, in its broadest sense -*If planning is everything maybe it's nothing*- remains a subject of debate and contention even after more than half a century (See Alexander (1981); Friedmann (1996); (T. Sanchez & N. Afzalan, 2018); T. W. Sanchez and N. Afzalan (2018)). Beyond Wildovsky's subjective and experimental arguments defending the failure of planning, the title of his study implies a well-known paradox in logic and philosophy concerning the problem of **vagueness**, known as the **Sorites Paradox** (Oms & Zardini, 2019). Planning, as an interdisciplinary field, comprises distinct epistemic natures, such as architecture, urban sociology, geography, etc. This statement can be reformulated in the logical form below (Hyde & Raffman, 2018):

$\Phi\alpha_n$
If $\Phi\alpha_n$ then $\Phi\alpha_{n-1}$
If $\Phi\alpha_{n-1}$ then $\Phi\alpha_{n-2}$
If $\Phi\alpha_1$ then $\Phi\alpha_0$

$\Phi\alpha_0$

'Φ' is a predicate for planning and 'α_n' (where *n* is a natural number) represents the number of subjects that planning includes. Based on Modus Ponens, we can logically conclude that planning includes nothing! For example, consider that we can remove some street design technical knowledge like 'sight distance triangle' from the *planning knowledge domain (T. Sanchez & N. Afzalan, 2018)*, it is evident that without this specific subject, planning remains planning and this subject is not an indispensable part of planning as a whole. The question then arises: Is there any specific borderline subject (Sainsbury, 2009, p. 41) that transforms planning into non-planning? These types of wicked questions with different formulations from the mentioned logical form, are the ground for many examinations of planning's disciplinary and professional identity, for instance, the existence of planning's *distinct intellectual underpinning* (Davoudi & Pendlebury, 2010) and so on. Davoudi & Pendlebury (2010, p. 613) argued based on the critical review of planning's dynamics

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from different perspectives (philosophical, sociological, historical, pedagogical, etc.) around the problem of lacking *the distinct intellectual underpinning* for planning as a discipline that led to this considerable consequence that "ambiguity about the nature of planning knowledge may lead to the weakening of its position as a distinct academic discipline".

This research seeks to identify such problems in a holistic and explanatory view in different cases by reviewing some selective holistic problem-oriented studies about planning as a discipline and profession extracting its descriptive and explanatory form of arguments in English-speaking countries (especially the UK and US) and then conducting a survey among Iranian planning professionals and graduates. Finally, it tries to interpret the findings with some different theoretical tools from sociology to political economy. Finally, the main goal of this research is to build a more general theory of planning's educational and professional issues from a holistic epistemological point of view. It's an initial step for clarifying epistemological aspects of planning as a science and academic discipline and can help to be a distinct discipline with its own special identity among others.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As previously mentioned, this study aims to provide an explanatory overview of the disciplinary and professional challenges and conflicts in the field of planning. To achieve this, we prioritize studies that adopt a broad, abstract approach to planning as a discipline and profession. Therefore, studies that focused on specific issues, such as the inclusion of sustainable development in the planning curriculum as a critical problem in planning education, will be excluded from our review.

Our selective review shows an initial typology of the related studies, even with acceptance of some overlap between each category.

The first type of study adopts an *evolutionary* perspective on the process of planning discipline and professional development. This evolutionary process is influenced by many different factors that can be critically examined to identify dysfunctionalities. For example, Rodwin (1981, pp. 262-266) used the analogy of the *adolescent human development process* to analyze the evolution process of planning. Based on Erik Erikson's theory of human development and using it as a metaphor, Rodwin (1981, p. 262) distinguished three major early periods in planning development: the first stage was shaping an independent *personality* from its parent's disciplines and professions. Then, planning in the so-called *semiautonomous* phase took great pride in their ambitious dreams and potential for large-scale accomplishments. In this phase, planners created master plans as a prophesied manifest of top-down development in comparison with evidence-based realistic types of plans. Changing the point of emphasis from making blueprint plans to the real planning process corresponds to the socially and goal-directed phase in human development, which is called adolescence. During this stage, some paradoxical situations arise because of confronting that illusory idealism with "a far more complicated reality". Psychological analogy helps us to conceptualize this situation for planning as "a crisis of wholeness" since it's necessary to develop "a sense of inner identity" at this particular moment (Rodwin, 1981, p. 263).

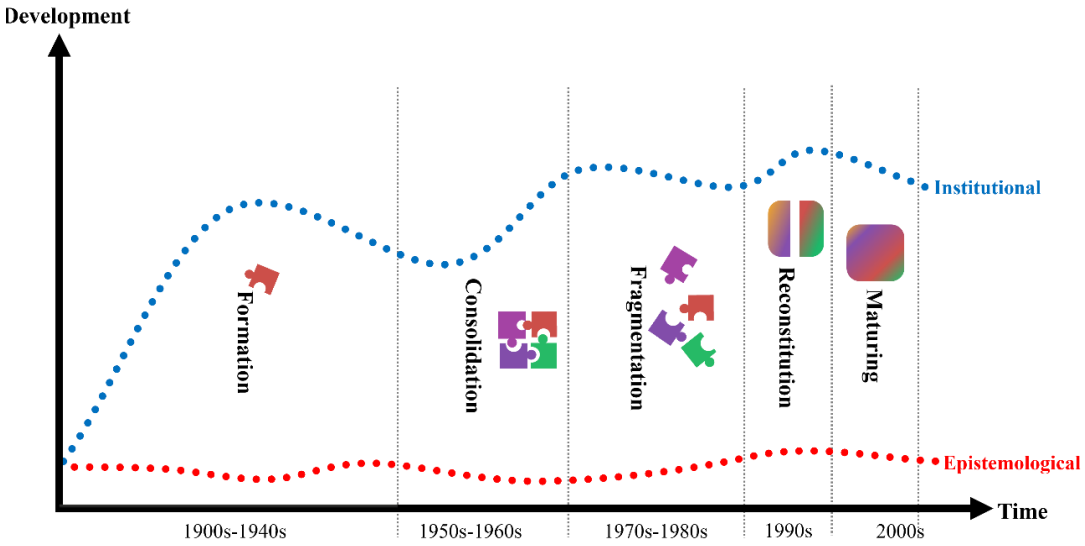

Fig 1. Evolutionary Path of the Planning Discipline (Based on Davoudi and Pendlebury (2010))

Davoudi and Pendlebury (2010) also conduct a comprehensive examination of the planning discipline in an *evolutionary* approach. They adopt a very realistic point of view of the actual forces and conditions of dynamics in the planning discipline's evolution process, such as institutional, philosophical, epistemological, pedagogical, societal, etc. Their conclusion is very challenging for the whole planning: "Although planning has evolved into an academic discipline in institutional terms, its *intellectual underpinning* has remained ill-defined". They proposed five different stages of planning's discipline evolutionary path that we turned into *Fig 1*. Based on this figure, we are now in the *maturing* stage which sounds good for planning discipline and profession, but maturing has a *double-edged nature*. There exists a risk that the adverse effects associated with the maturation process may result in increased overlap, diffusion, and fragmentation within the discipline (Davoudi & Pendlebury, 2010, pp. 639-640).

The second type of research utilizes *scientometric* methods and *survey-based* techniques for identifying planning's disciplinary and professional issues. They are complementary for studies seeking to have an in-depth causal understanding of these issues. The reason is that these positivist researches just rely on the self-reporting subjective reality of planning's status quo by using questionnaires and identifying planners' perceptions about their important skills and competencies. They just have a tiny intellectual endeavor to inquire as to why, one hundred years after the establishment of the planning discipline, we should inquire about the extent of our knowledge in comparison to related and unrelated disciplines and professions. Guzzetta and Bollens (2003) conducted a survey among planners and non-planners (related and non-related) to determine if planners' views on important skills differ from those of other groups. Across all three groups, they find that *communication* abilities are more highly valued than technical and quantitative skills. Planners, however, place a higher emphasis on *report writing* and writing for the general public than do other professionals, whether or not they are involved in planning. The other related surveys (Osawa & Seltzer, 1999) also show the importance of *communicative skills* rather than skills related to microeconomic analysis and regression analysis. T. Sanchez and N. Afzalan (2018) also did a scientometric analysis to identify the planning knowledge domain in response to Wildovsky's (1973) claim regarding planning (*If planning is everything, maybe it's nothing*). This research tries to prove that planning is not everything and it has its own limitations and specialties.

The third category is the *pedagogical* approach to planning. It concerns the curriculum and syllabus design and its performance in the real market and its relations with the real world. The pioneer in this field was Harvey S. Perloff. Perloff's famous statement about planners' education has become a paradigm in many literatures that concern planning's disciplinary issues: "There is the need to confront the issues of increasingly specialized and technical knowledge *by training not the narrow specialist but the generalist with a specialty*" (Perloff, 1985, p. 257). With consideration of Perloff's ideas, Friedmann (1996) did a critical examination of 20 planning schools' programs in North America and concluded about the generalist nature of these programs and tried to give some content-based advice for developing planning core curriculum. He tried to specify the domain of planning in a theoretical manner, and it's fundamentally different from the formal and positivist work of Sanchez and Afzalan (2018). More recently, Edwards and Bates (2011) analyzed the core curricula of thirty accredited planning schools. They found some contradictions and tensions in these curricula; the fact is that there are two different poles on the spectrum: one concerns the real job market needs for the planners, and the other just has utopian humanistic aspirations for making better settlements (Edwards & Bates, 2011, p. 181). Like Friedmann, Edwards and Bates (2011) concluded that there is a continued problem of the vagueness of purpose for many planning schools. Some other studies have also addressed the lack of generalizability of many so-called scientific urban planning research, attributing it to the absence of proper training in research methods, especially qualitative research methods, in the curriculum of this field (Delaei Milan & Kheyroddin, 2016).

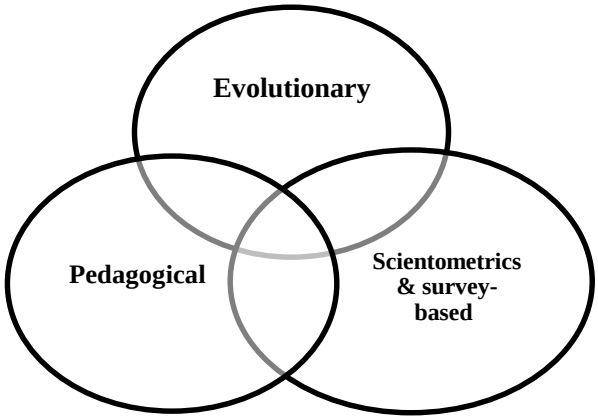

Fig 2. The Initial Categories of Planning Discipline and Education Studies

Based on the review presented, planning has evolved as an academic discipline from an institutional perspective. However, both epistemologically and pedagogically, it has not transformed into a discipline with a clearly defined identity and continues to seek recognition of its identity throughout its historical evolution. The primary aim of this study is to explain why these issues arise in the discourse of planning from a holistic perspective and to interpret the conditions that have contributed to the current challenges facing the field of planning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The subject of this study includes both clear and ambiguous features, making it difficult to select a particular approach for explaining it. We aim to evaluate the position of the profession and the status of the discipline, which, according to the theoretical foundations presented, has an ambiguous intellectual basis and cannot be clearly defined. Its distinction from other disciplines and professions such as geography, architecture, etc. Its exclusive competencies are ill-defined in comparison to other established professions. However, in light of the concerns mentioned in the theoretical fundamentals section, this study seeks to investigate these issues in Iran using questionnaires and a survey method (through the method of non-probability sampling).

The Statistical Population and Sampling

The statistical population of this research consists of all graduates of urban planning bachelor's programs, as well as students and graduates of master's and higher programs in urban and regional planning, urban planning, regional planning, urban management, urban design, and other educational programs similar to these that have a related or unrelated bachelor's degree. Sampling was conducted using a non-probability method. The questionnaires were distributed manually and through email and urban planning groups present on social media networks. It is obvious that this sampling is not a fully professional sampling in terms of statistical ideals; rather, it is a kind of pre-sampling for future research that has appropriate financial support.

Considering the financial and time constraints and the relationship involved in the distribution of the questionnaires, the sample size for this research is 61 individuals, including graduates, professionals, and professors in the field of planning. In statistical inference, according to the rule of thumb for small samples, a significance level of 0.05 is used (de Vaus, 2014, p. 192). Therefore, considering the small sample size examined in this study, this significance level has also been adopted as the basis.

Data Collection Tools

A questionnaire comprising both open-ended and closed-ended questions was used to gather the data. The theoretical underpinnings that have been studied are the main source of these queries. Because many aspects of the subject under investigation are unknown, open-ended questions were used. This is because, in survey research, one method of interpreting the data is to ask the community being studied why they behaved and thought the way they did (de Vaus, 2014, p. 12). These self-reported explanations can therefore be used in the thinking and interpreting process and, if they have commonalities, they can be grouped into homogeneous groups.

Data Analysis Method

The data were analyzed through cross-tabulation, examining the relative frequency of responses to certain questions, and categorizing the importance of skills and abilities of planners.

SURVEY DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive Analysis

The distribution of all the variables under examination is presented in Table 4. Next, we will only explain the variables for which there was a need to reiterate the reasons for their selection.

Inherited Cultural Capital

To measure the socio-economic background status (inherited cultural capital) among urban planners, the indicator of the parents' occupation was used. The reason for this is based on the theory of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He, in the book *'Distinction*' (1984) in analyzing the reason for individuals' inclination to obtain low-value university degrees, introduces a term called the *hysteresis effect*. In his view, the hysteresis effect is greater for actors who are more distanced from the educational system and have little or merely vague information about the market related to academic degrees (having less inherited cultural capital). He adds, "But those who have more inherited cultural capital, correspondingly, have more practical or theoretical knowledge about

the fluctuations in the market for educational credentials and an instinct for investing in this market, which enables them to make the best use of their inherited cultural capital in the education market or to make the best use of their educational capital in the job market; for example, by recognizing the right time to exit declining fields and professions and shifting towards fields and professions with better futures instead of clinging to the nominal and school values that previously guaranteed the highest returns in this market" (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, by understanding the extent to which the graduates of the field under study possess this capital, we can better comprehend the reasons behind choosing a field that, according to theoretical examination, has an unclear rational basis and is facing a professional trust crisis from this perspective.

About 58% of the respondents belonged to the middle class (meaning their father's occupation was reported as employee, retired employee, retiree, driver, military, etc.), 19% belonged to the petty bourgeoisie (those who reported their father's occupation as self-employed), and 23% belonged to the upper middle class (those who reported their father's occupation as manager, lawyer, and doctor).

The Level of Education of The Respondents

In this research, 22% of the respondents had a bachelor's degree, 71% had a master's degree, and 7% had a doctoral degree. About 82% of the respondents with a bachelor's degree were from public universities, 12% from private and non-profit universities, 5% from Payame Noor University, and 2% from universities abroad. Additionally, among those with a master's degree, 68% graduated from state universities, 26% from private or non-profit universities, 2% from Payame Noor University, and 4% from universities abroad.

The Occupation

The question regarding the respondents' occupation was open-ended, and they were asked to provide the title of their current job.

Table 2 shows the type of job and the absolute and relative frequency of each in the sample under study.

The Main Work Tasks

This question was designed in an open format, and therefore, after the completion of the questionnaire filling process, the responses were categorized into homogeneous groups. The most important work tasks that the respondents mentioned are:

- Preparation of plans (including urban development plans, revitalization of dilapidated areas, etc.).
- Approval, supervision, and revision of the plan
- Project and plan management and field surveys
- Participating in meetings such as technical committee meetings and the Article 5 Commission of the detailed plan, etc.
- Report writing
- Preparing maps
- Modeling
- Visioning
- Data mining and data collection
- Quality-oriented
- Providing logical solutions to the existing issues of urban society

With these considerations, it seems that the life and death of urban planners are based on the existence of something called a 'plan'. In this context, the public and governmental side primarily has the duty of approving and overseeing the process and outcome of these plans, while the private side is responsible for preparing, justifying, and defending these plans.

Table 1. Type of Job and Its Share in the Sample

Current job	Relative frequency (%)
Urban planning manager and expert in consulting companies	49
Free (unrelated)	4
University lecturer	4
Student	14
Employees in the public sector	6
Data collector	2
GIS officer in the municipality	2
Technical Office Manager	2
Urban Designer	2
Member of the company's board of directors	4
Employee in the Engineering System Organization	2
Translator and researcher	4
Others	6
Total	100

The Discrepancy Between Education and Profession

One of the open-ended questions in the survey was whether there is a discrepancy between the tasks you perform in your current job in urban planning and what you were taught (are being taught) at the university. If so, please provide examples and reasons for it.

The responses to the above question were categorized into four groups: 'yes', 'somewhat yes', 'no', and 'somewhat no'. As a result, 53% of respondents answered yes to this question, 13% answered somewhat yes, 28% answered no, and 6% answered somewhat no. Some of the most important reasons and sometimes solutions provided by respondents who answered 'yes' to the question are:

- Teaching in an idealistic manner without considering the economic aspect
- Being workshop-oriented instead of having internships and practical experience
- Lack of work experience among professors and teaching of non-applicable subjects
- Respondents referred to reasons outside the field, such as bureaucratic issues in project approval and the influence of political-economic power holders.
- The high volume of teaching theoretical courses that are practically useless (such as urban facilities and equipment)
- Copy-pasting existing similar designs in workshops
- The university's neglect of the relevance of this field to the market pulse
- The issues that are generally taught at universities are not practical; they are declarations of global experiences or theories.
- In the field of new paradigms of urban planning and the intertwined relationship between social sciences and urban planning, there is no place in the professional world, and plans and programs are pursued based on old methods and techniques without a clear framework and structure, lacking authenticity and existential essence.
- Unfamiliarity with negotiation techniques, social traditions, and the perception of urban planners as facilitators based on new paradigms.

Some of the most important reasons and sometimes solutions provided by respondents who answered 'somewhat yes' to the question include:

- Neglect of statistical analysis
- The insufficient number of credits for some specialized courses like traffic due to employment in this specialized field
- The lack of teaching methods for feasibility studies of private investment in the real estate market with the highest returns
- The lack of serious discussion on modeling in universities and the use of outdated models
- The political nature of planning outside the framework of the seemingly logical structure of university education.

And finally, some of the most important reasons and sometimes solutions provided by respondents who answered ' somewhat no' to the question are:

- Some skills such as the principles of field surveys and mapping, map reading, principles of urban planning map preparation, principles of extracting information from raw data, principles of using spreadsheets, principles of report writing, principles of layout design, etc. They must be taught systematically at the undergraduate level based on the needs of government offices, municipalities, and the private sector.
- Some other skills that fall under different fields of science, such as urban economics, urban sociology, geography and climatology, statistics, modeling, and research methods, are not taught in a specialized manner during the master's degree program.

Desire to Study Urban Planning Again

Another question in the survey was whether they would study in this field again if they could turn back time (63% answered yes to this question, and 37% answered no).

Those who answered yes to this question have listed their reasons for this choice as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Reasons for the Desire to Study Again in the Field

Reason	(%)
Interdisciplinary nature	43
Personal interest	30
The community needs in this field	9
The necessity of prioritizing planning in all human actions	9
It is a suitable tool for thinking about social and economic trends	4
The ethical aspect of this field (preferring public interests over personal ones)	4
Total	100

However, those who answered 'no' to this question have listed their reasons for this choice as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3. Reasons for Reluctance to Study Again in the Field

Reason	(%)
Inability to develop a specific specialization	28
Unsatisfactory work and economic conditions	44
Unclear professional identity	17
External non-acceptance of the discipline	11
Total	100

It is clear that the reasons of those who answered 'no' to the question under discussion are closer to what was examined in the theoretical foundations of this study.

Application of Differential Equations

One of the courses taught in the undergraduate program of Urban Planning and Design in Iran is Differential Equations. The sample was asked whether this course has had any specific application for them or not, and if it has, what application it has had (67% answered no to this question, 12% yes, and 21% somewhat). It is worth mentioning that among those who answered 'yes' to this question, only one person was able to provide a specific and concrete answer (the application of the population growth rate formula).

The Most Important Skills for Hiring

The most important skills required for hiring an inexperienced planner professionally are detailed in Table 5.

The Most Important Skills for Career Advancement

The most important skills required for advancement in the planning profession are outlined in Table 6.

Inferential Analysis

In inferential statistics, according to the rule of thumb for small samples, a significance level of 0.05 was used (de Vaus, 2014, p. 230). Therefore, considering the small sample size in this study, this significance level has also been considered as the basis.

Estimation of ratios

Since the mean cannot be calculated for nominal and ordinal data, in order to infer the population of variables, there should only be two categories. Therefore, the categories often need to be combined after the variable classes are reduced to two classes (de Vaus, 2014, p. 233). The sample size under consideration is less than 5% of the statistical population ($n/N \ll 0.05$). To calculate the standard deviation of the mean (Q_p), appropriate statistical formulas were used (RafiPour, 2012, p. 382).

Table 4. Relative Frequency of Variables in the Sample and Inference of Sample Ratios for the Population

Type of variable	Share in the sample (%)	Range of share in the population (%)	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
Gender			
Woman	57	69	45
Man	43	55	31
Activity sector			
Private and self-employed	74	85	63
Public	26	37	15
Mismatch between education and profession			
Yes	66	78	54
No	34	46	22
Desire to study again in the field			
Yes	63	75	51
No	37	49	25
Application of differential equations			
Yes	23	34	12
No	77	88	66

Table 5. Important Skills for hiring Inexperienced Planners

Type of skill	Average rank	Rank
Effective presentation	5.92	1
Report writing	5.81	2
Interpersonal communication	5.7	3
GIS	5.56	4
Familiarity with laws	5.22	5
Familiarity with policies	5.21	6
Quantitative analyses	4.92	7
Technical skills	4.07	8
Economics and Regression Analysis	2.58	9

The Friedman test shows that this ranking is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 6. Important Skills for Career Advancement of Planners According to Professional Planners

Type of skill	Average rank	Rank
Familiarity with laws	5.95	1
Familiarity with policies	5.95	2
Interpersonal communication	5.78	3
Effective presentation	5.57	4
Report Writing	5.27	5
GIS	4.96	6
Quantitative analyses	4.57	7
Technical skills	3.89	8
Economic analysis and regression	3.06	9

The Friedman test shows that this ranking is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Measuring the Effect of Gender

The gender of those who answered negatively to the question of willingness to study urban planning again may influence this response. In other words, due to the unequal conditions of the labor market for women and men in Iran and the significant difference in unemployment and activity rates between the two genders, public dissatisfaction with these conditions may be the reason for women's reluctance to pursue further studies in this field, rather than the internal problems of this discipline and its unclear and undefined identity. In the sample, by forming a contingency table (de Vaus, 2014, pp. 108-118) for the variable's 'gender' and 'willingness to study again in the field', it was determined that out of all the women respondents to the question, 43% answered negatively, whereas 24% of the men did. For the variables 'gender' and 'willingness to study the field again', it was determined that 43% of all female respondents to the question in question answered no, while 24% of all male respondents did. But is this difference generalizable to the population as well? And is there a relationship between these two variables or are they independent of each other? To answer this question, considering the type of variables, the Chi-square test for independence is used, and if the independence hypothesis is rejected, the correlation coefficient based on the Chi-square value (Cramér's V. Phi) is used to determine the strength of the relationship (de Vaus, 2014, p. 258). The calculation of this coefficient shows that the significance value of the chi-square statistic is 0.151, and therefore, considering the chosen significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis of independence between the two variables is not rejected. Therefore, the answer 'no' to the question under discussion is not related to the respondent's gender, and in other words, the effect of gender on it is neutral.

INTERPRETATION AND EXPLANATION

To explain and interpret the survey results, one cannot solely rely on what exists within the framework of the academic discipline of planning. In fact, when it comes to the position of a discipline and profession, especially with a 'critical thinking' orientation, one cannot solely rely on internal theories and concepts to explain and interpret the results. Many of the forces and factors determining the current conditions and status of this profession, as well as the forces that hinder its process of 'differentiation' from other fields and professions, lie outside of it. In fact, within the framework of intra-disciplinary and professional resources and references, we can only conclude that planning is facing a professional crisis and ambiguity in the rational underpinning of the discipline and

confusion of roles, etc. is facing. However, as can be inferred from interdisciplinary articles and research, they too have resorted to other scientific fields to explain and interpret their results. Therefore, for example, to explain why the ratio of women to men in this field and profession is higher, we cannot refer to urban planning theories (if they exist), or explain why individuals who often belong to a specific social class choose a field that even lacks the ability to explain its own essence and take such a risk in the current chaotic job market. Also, to explain what strategies the actors and agents within the field and profession, which according to one of its most important thinkers, 'Sir Peter Hall,' have been constantly and continuously marginalized over the past few decades (Hall, 2014), we still cannot refer to the internal resources themselves. Therefore, we use the conceptual model shown in Figure 2. Model for Explaining and Interpreting Research Results and Expanding the Reviewed Theories to explain and interpret the survey results of this thesis and also to validate the results of the sources examined in the second section.

Sociological Interpretation (Bourdieuian)

Pierre Bourdieu, in his book *Distinction*, shows how each social-professional class creates its own specific 'culture' based on its own lifestyles and aesthetic preferences. Social-professional class creates how one can observe unconscious and sometimes conscious tendencies in aligning these styles and tastes in all areas (including field and career selection (Fakouhi, 2006, pp. 288-289). Therefore, by utilizing Bourdieu's views, we aim to explain/interpret how urban planners, as a socio-professional class, construct their culture, status, and social prestige. In fact, the fundamental issue for urban planners, as mentioned, is that they do not have the ability to fully distinguish themselves from their parent disciplines and professions (the issue of something more). Now, one must ask what issues such a group faces in the process of differentiation and creating a distinct identity. One might ask how a field and profession that is unable to create a distinct identity and has an ambiguous and declining status in the current world, faces conditions from the perspective of a social variable such as gender. What strategies does it adopt to overcome these conditions in the face of declining social status and prestige? It is also possible to explain or interpret the reasons for the choice of a declining field and profession by a specific social class or stratum in light of Bourdieu's theories.

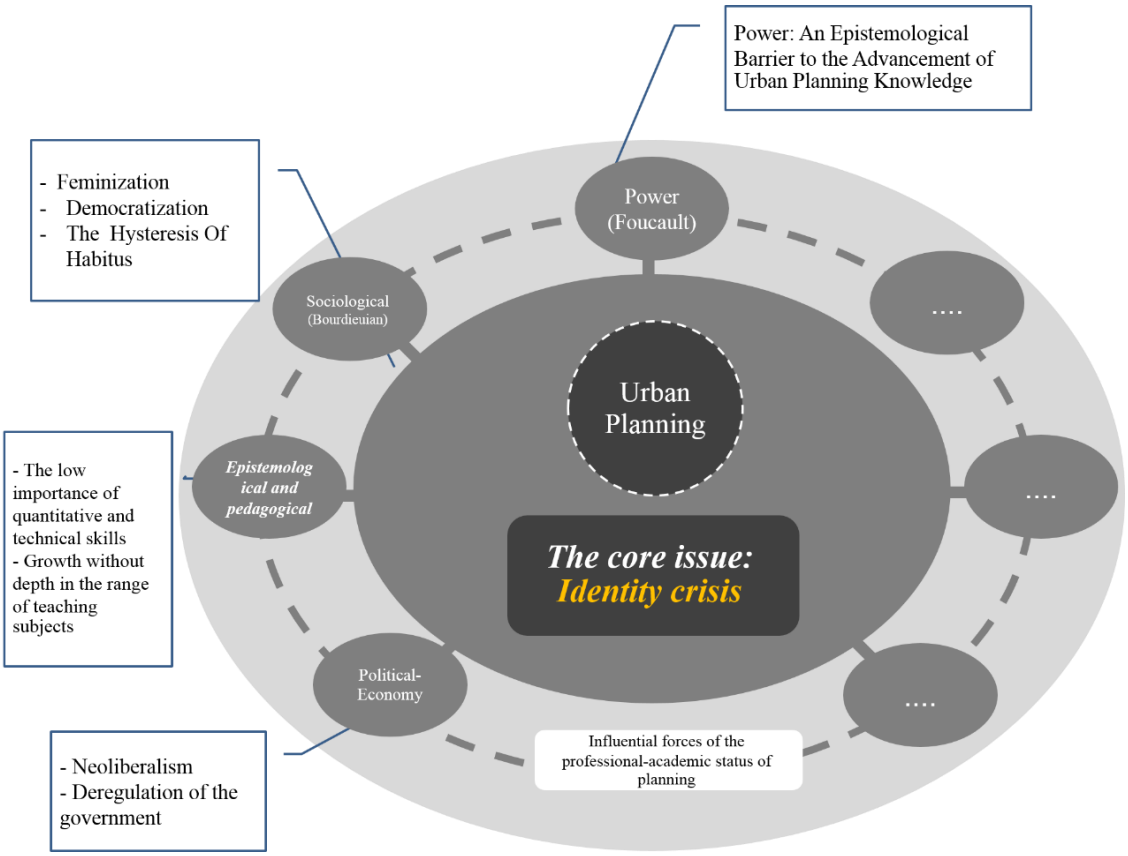

Fig 2. Model for Explaining and Interpreting Research Results and Expanding the Reviewed Theories

Feminization and Democratization

In the sample, 43% of the respondents were male and 57% were female. Additionally, the estimation of this ratio for the statistical population indicates that it can be a maximum of 69% for women and 31% for men. Some empirical evidence also supports the hypothesis of a higher female-to-male ratio in this field and profession. The author's experience working with consulting engineers also supports this claim. But how can this dominance of the female gender over the male in this field or profession be explained/interpreted? Based on Pierre Bourdieu's theories, "the decline of a position and occupation may manifest either in 'feminization' or in 'democratization' or aging'. Similarly, this is true for any group defined by its position in a field, for example, a university discipline in the hierarchy of disciplines, [...] a degree in the academic hierarchy" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 103). Therefore, the feminization of the field and profession of planning may indicate a decline in its status within the hierarchy of other fields and professions. In the specific case of consulting engineers, where 49% of the employed respondents in the sample of this study were working, this issue can be interpreted in such a way that female employees, considering the low-income level of this profession and the repeated delays of these companies in paying salaries, are seen as more suitable for employment by employers. Richard Anker and Catherine Hein, in explaining "the reasons why employers consider women more suitable for certain jobs", mentioned the characteristics of requesting "lower wages and greater obedience" (Anker & Hein, 1985, p. 85).

However, the issue of democratization can be pursued in the 'open-door' status of the urban planning program at the master's level. In other words, graduates of any field have the opportunity to take the specialized exam of their own field and, as a second field, in the Urban and Regional Planning and Urban Management group. However, democratization is not merely a process that reveals the decline in job and professional status; rather, it is also a kind of collective strategy (at the elite level) to escape this decline. Bourdieu (1984, p. 80) in this regard, states that one of the objective mechanisms that intensifies the depreciation of the value of university degree holders to the nominal value of these degrees is "[...] the creation of relatively self-sustaining markets in which the value of degrees decreases at a slower rate". The term "self-sustaining market" in urban planning refers to a market that is created, guided, and controlled by the graduates of this field themselves. For example, the market for books, magazines, graduate classes, and most importantly, the university market. In fact, being an open-door entrance discipline means increasing the potential and actual demand for these markets.

The Impact of the Hysteresis of Habitus

According to the survey results, about 58% of the respondents were from the middle class. The upper bound of the estimated range can be as high as 70%. According to Bourdieu (1984), the hysteresis of habitus causes categories of understanding and evaluation that were appropriate in the past to be applied to the new situation of the credential market. Therefore, the clear relationship between the planning degree and the job market in the past (for example, when the former Ministry of Housing and Urban Development used to sponsor some geography and urban planning students) may, due to this hysteresis effect, be applied in the current conditions, where the situation has fundamentally changed, by individuals with specific class characteristics. It was also mentioned, quoting Bourdieu, which the hysteresis effect is greater for actors who are more distanced from the educational system and have minimal or merely vague information about the market related to academic degrees. Bourdieu (1984) adds that, conversely, those who possess more inherited cultural capital have correspondingly greater practical or theoretical knowledge about the fluctuations in the educational credential market and a sense for investing in this market, which enables them to make the best use of their inherited cultural capital in the education market; or to make the best use of their educational capital in the job market, for example, by identifying the right time to exit declining fields and professions and shifting towards fields and professions with better futures, instead of clinging to the nominal and school values that previously guaranteed the highest returns in this market. With these considerations, it seems that in the case of urban planning, those who are often the children of employees, meaning individuals with little inherited cultural capital and who are more distanced from the educational 8 compared to those who belong to a class composed of doctors, lawyers, high-ranking managers, and shareholders of large companies, are more likely to make mistakes in correctly identifying fields whose degrees hold value. They are more likely to make mistakes in correctly identifying fields whose degrees hold value. They often succumb to the nominal value of degrees. In fact, the unclear relationship between clerical jobs and university degrees in Iran, which has been instilled in the minds of these decision-makers by their parents during their pre-university life, and the remnants of this belief, further contribute to the issue. They judge for themselves that as long as we study in a field at

university, we will definitely have a job, or there will definitely be a job defined for it in this system, and in our future existence, just as it was reproduced for our working father or mother through having a job that is not very skill-based, It was discussed that choosing the field of urban planning at the undergraduate level cannot be an informed choice, even if some individuals select it because their relatives studied this field. This choice is still uninformed because the idea of what planners do in practice is not only unclear to others but also to themselves. For example, we showed that one of the most important professional skills of planners is 'report writing'. Now, is it really conceivable for those who choose the field of 'Urban planning' to imagine that the main expertise of a planner and designer, instead of mastering mathematics, physics, and calculations, is report writing?

Epistemological and Pedagogical Interpretation

Important Skills for Planners in Iran

The lack of importance placed on quantitative skills, microeconomic analysis, and regression among planning graduates and professionals makes them unable to establish causal relationships in a practical manner (such as through cross-tabulations, and various types of bivariate or multivariate regressions) between the different variables they deal with.

For example, one of the so-called specialized tasks that planners manage or directly undertake is physical surveying. In the physical survey, various variables are collected through a complete enumeration, such as the age of the building, the quality of the building, its usage, and so on. However, there is no specific theory regarding the relationship between these variables with each other or with, for example, some socio-economic variables such as socio-economic status. Also, the low importance of quantitative skills and regression analysis makes them incapable of formulating mathematical concepts such as 'proposed base density' in urban development plans. It is still possible that the proposed density of the city is determined based on the subjective intuition of the consultant or the imposition of the opinions of the employer or the main stakeholders of the plan.

The Superficial Expansion of The Planning

In this research, graduates of the planning field were asked about the application and explanation of a specific example from one of the undergraduate courses in Urban Planning called 'Differential Equations'. As mentioned in the previous sections, 77% of the respondents in the sample under review answered 'no' to this question, which for the population, at least, is estimated to be 66%. In fact, the answer to this question is one of the pieces of evidence for what was mentioned in the section reviewing the historical process of the evolution of the planning discipline in the West. In explaining the *'maturity'* stage of the evolution process of this field, it was mentioned that the educational foundation of this field became so dispersed that it expanded its scope not only to social sciences but also to natural sciences. This growth without depth, as Davoudi and Pendlebury (2010) concluded, could be a sign of the potential fragmentation of this field. Now, in the latest approved curriculum for the undergraduate program in Iran, the subject of physics has also been added (why not chemistry?). We have shown that in practice, both in the United States and in Iran, 'communication skills' hold the greatest importance in the field of urban planning. For example, at one of the best universities in the world today, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), one of the courses taught at the undergraduate level is 'The Art and Science of Negotiation'. In fact, as mentioned in the section on the academic discipline of planning, today the field of planning has developed into an independent and highly regarded social science discipline. This raises questions about admitting students at the undergraduate level exclusively from mathematics and physics backgrounds.

Interpretation Based on Political Economy

A historical examination of the evolution of the urban planning discipline and profession revealed that with the dominance of neoliberal ideology in Britain in the 1980s, planning faced the issues of a rationality crisis and professional despair, as well as organizational turmoil and educational fragmentation, which collectively made this profession-discipline more vulnerable (Davoudi & Pendlebury, 2010). It was also mentioned that in the worst-case scenario for society, 63% of planners work in the private sector and are self-employed. But in the United States, in 2012, 76% of planners worked for the government, and this figure is expected to be 71% by 2022 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Also, as Kelly and Becker (2000, p. 220) state regarding the planning profession, "the statistics related to employment in the private sector are somewhat misleading", and therefore the share of those working in the public and governmental sectors in the United States is higher than the reported ratio. According to the survey results, the opposite is true in Iran. Based on the new interpretation of Article 44 of

the Constitution and the increasing trend of deregulating the government and administration, as well as the rampant growth of so-called private consulting firms that reduced the process of urban development planning to a kind of service work, instead of strengthening the technical body of the planning apparatuses, the profession of planning, which, as mentioned, is the profession of the welfare state, has been caught in a limbo between being private and public; although it was nominally private, it remained practically dependent on government payments. This time, instead of being accountable to a group of individuals, namely its employees who were officially and long-term employed, it became accountable to a non-physical (legal) entity, namely a consultant, who employed people with short-term contracts or even without contracts, while an army of unemployed graduates was waiting behind their doors, content with such conditions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In accordance with the fields of interpretation and explanation in the previous section, five proposals have been presented regarding the enhancement of the status of the urban planning discipline and profession and the improvement of its current condition. The first proposal is related to the epistemological barriers outside the field that hinder the development of urban planning knowledge. The next suggestion is a major proposal for redesigning the curricula of undergraduate and graduate programs. The third proposal is a specific and feasible recommendation for changing the curriculum of this field based on the results of the conducted survey. In other words, a collective request from the graduates and professionals of this field for the lack of teaching units in a course is presented in the form of a proposal. Finally, the fourth proposal refers to the current gap in social sciences (spatial ignorance) and how urban planning can help fill it.

Epistemology and Power

Foucoult (1975, p. 224) states that "the transformation of power relations" is one of the causes of "the formation [and advancement] of certain sciences". For example, he says one of the epistemological barriers to the development of medical knowledge was that in the seventeenth century and earlier, "the visit of the doctor, who came from outside the hospital, was linked to other controls—religious, administrative—and the doctor had little involvement in the daily management of the hospital". But after that, gradually until the late 18th century, "the physician's visits became more regular and especially more extensive, and the visit became an increasingly important part of hospital operations". The previous form of inspection, which was intermittent and quick, turned into a regular observation that constantly examined the patient. "This had two consequences: the doctor, who until then was an external element in the internal hierarchy of the [hospital], gradually replaced the religious staff [...] the hospital itself, which was more than anything a place of care, transformed into a center for education and the transfer of knowledge [...]". The culmination of these transformations causes the field of "medicine to set aside its bookish nature and place its subjects less in the tradition of important writers and more in the realm of objects [patients] that are always under examination.

This transformation in power relations caused, on the one hand, humans to become "describable and analyzable objects" and, on the other hand, created the possibility of "establishing a comparative system for measuring widespread phenomena, describing groups, determining the characteristics of group data, estimating the distances between individuals, and distributing them in a population". And is knowledge anything other than these things?

Nowadays, from high-ranking political-religious leaders to ordinary people, everyone is an object describable and analyzable by medical science, and the doctor has the power and legitimacy to perform any action within the framework of his knowledge.

But what can be said about urban planning? Theoretically, the main mission of planning is to rein in the wild horse of land and space use for purely personal benefits within the framework of the capitalist system to safeguard the 'public interest.' However, the main prerequisite for controlling land use is understanding land from various dimensions. Land and buildings appear to be objects and therefore can be understood. Of course, we also have some ability to understand the objective aspects of the land; the topography of the land, land use, land occupancy rate, building density of the land, and so on.; however, the fundamental epistemological barrier in this path, which is the essential characteristic of the land that is always concealed, is the name, occupation, and generally the identity of the real and legal owners of the land at small and large scales such as cities and ... It is. Here, the land is no longer an object; here, we no longer have absolute legitimacy like surgeons manipulating certain parts of a patient's body within the framework of medical knowledge. This is the place where power and wealth are intertwined with the object (land).

The names and titles of the main land and building owners are heavily protected in the extensive bureaucracy. The discovery of the correlation between these names and the accumulation of wealth and power, especially in politics, signifies the birth of urban planning knowledge and public awareness: a connection between knowledge and action, useful and legitimate knowledge. Today in Iran, urban planners are considered an external element to the state organizations much like doctors in the seventeenth century.

Ultimately, regarding the field and profession of urban planning in Iran at present, it can be said that the possibility of its advancement and stabilization hinges on the transformation of power relations. As long as urban planning does not find a suitable position within the power hierarchy, as long as the union between the profession and the state is not re-established, and as long as there is no so-called political-civil legitimacy among the powerful on one side and the masses on the other, the continuation of this field will face many challenges and obstacles, and there is a fear that its scientific and professional status will gradually decline even further. Perhaps one of the strategies to overcome the aforementioned situation is to pay significant attention to the nature of power in Iran and the relationship between wealth accumulation and land, as well as the new oligarchies that have developed in this context (Daneshpour et al., 2022). It is evident that increasing this mental sensitivity requires a revision of the curriculum of this field and a fundamental transformation in the values and perspectives of its educational group.

Training Planners as Generalists with A Specialization

Harvey Perloff, in order to enable planning to compete with the increasing specialized knowledge and technologies, suggested that planners should not be trained merely as narrow specialists but as 'generalists with a specialty' (Perloff, 1956, p. 35). A proposal that has been overlooked in the historical process of the evolution of the academic discipline of planning. The issue is that the first generation of professors teaching in the field of urban planning, who still hold significant influence, have a 'dual' identity. Many of them have a background in architecture, geography, etc. They are, and therefore their disciplinary and professional identity is not entirely dependent on this field. Therefore, it seems that this first generation of urban planning professors did not have the concern of the identity crisis faced by those whose academic and professional identity is entirely dependent on the field and profession of urban planning. Those who wander between the humanities and technical fields "find no solace, only an increase in their fear".

Therefore, the curriculum and the professional internship within it should be redesigned in such a way that it allows for a specific specialization alongside the general and overarching topics that exist in this field and profession. For example, simply passing two courses on transportation or urban facilities does not make one a specialist in these two subjects—at least not to the extent that it would address the issues in the traffic and transportation section of a comprehensive or detailed plan, rural development, or the renovation of dilapidated areas. Therefore, it is possible to provide the opportunity for students in the final semesters of their undergraduate or master's programs to take more courses in these specialized subjects. In fact, with this approach, a curriculum is developed that not only has a command of the general topics discussed in this field—with all its flaws—but also, as Perloff said, becomes a 'generalist with a specific expertise '.

It is also suggested that the study approach of individuals be determined during the undergraduate period. In fact, someone who is engaged in the humanities and social sciences cannot simultaneously work with climate-based urban design modeling using a certain software.

Adding Statistics-Related Courses

In response to the question of the application of differential equations in the field and profession of planning, it was noteworthy that many respondents suggested increasing the number of statistics credits in the undergraduate or graduate programs instead of this course. The shift of this field towards social sciences in leading countries like the United States also makes the necessity of this issue even more pronounced. Weakness in statistical knowledge reduces the research capabilities of graduates and professors in this field. It is obvious that with just two units of statistics, half of which is spent on reviewing the topics of 'combinatorics' and 'probability', there is no room left for teaching precise non-parametric statistics or multivariate regressions, as well as more advanced topics that are currently applicable in emerging fields like spatial econometrics. Additionally, this could be a step towards the initial formulation of a specific research methodology for this field.

Return to Political Economy

As previously mentioned, one of the key areas of study that can serve as a foundation for clarifying the epistemic status of the field and profession of planning

is 'space.' In fact, space can become the fundamental subject of research in this field. But what adds to the importance of such attention is the existence of gaps in contemporary social sciences in this regard. Raewyn Connell, a professor of sociology at the University of Sydney, argues in the ninth chapter of the book 'Southern Theory' titled 'The Silence of the Land' that the hidden assumption of most modern social science theories is 'spatial detachment.' In his view, the general characteristic of modern social theory is: "a lack of interest in place, material context, and especially land". In his opinion, social sciences usually prefer free generalizations from context (Connell, 2007, p. 196).

However, according to Connell (2007), social sciences have not always possessed the aforementioned characteristics. In his view, in the past before the specialization of social sciences (See Wallerstein, 1984), political economy paid special attention to place and land. For example, the classic book "The Wealth of Nations" dedicates a long chapter titled "The Permission of Land" to this topic (Connell, 2007, p. 196).

But what is important about this silencing of land or space-estrangement in modern social science theory is understanding the reasons behind it. Connell's answer to this question is 'neoliberalism' in one word. Connell says that neoliberalism currently dominating the world has epistemic as well as economic and political consequences. Further explanation is that the market society built on the foundations of global commodification necessitates a kind of global abstraction as a fundamental part of its reality. It seems that the placeless abstractions of neoclassical economics lead to this representation. Connell continues by saying that the neglect of land is not merely a theoretical choice among various subjects; rather, it has emerged as a characteristic of the ideology of neoliberal society (Connell, 2007, pp. 207-208). 207-208). Therefore, urban planning has the opportunity to seek an alternative against to this neoliberal ideology by reconfiguring the concept of space and its related concepts.

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