

Original Research Article

Space-Based Gender Justice: From Conceptual Construction to Discourse Analysis of Tehran's Fourth Urban Progress Plan

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Abstract

Problem statement: Despite the recognized importance of gender justice in urban studies, this concept has remained marginal within development policies. In Iran, research has largely focused on describing spatial inequalities, while paying less attention to the discursive mechanisms of the planning system. The central problem addressed in this study is the absence of a conceptual framework for analyzing gender justice in planning documents and the ambiguity surrounding the position of this concept within urban discourses -particularly where the nodal signifier of “urban justice” is foregrounded, yet the boundaries of its inclusiveness vis-à-vis citizens’ gendered experiences and the inequalities arising from them remain unclear.

Research objective: This study aims to formulate a conceptual framework for “space-based gender justice” and to analyze how it is represented within the urban justice discourse of Tehran’s Fourth Progress Plan (1401–1404 / 2022–2025).

Research method: The research was conducted in two stages. First, a framework for “space-based gender justice” was developed through an analytical–deductive approach grounded in feminist theories of space. Second, this framework was employed to examine the articulation of the discourse of Tehran’s Fourth Urban Progress Plan (as a meaning-producing policy text), drawing on Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse-theoretical approach.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that the plan’s dominant discourse is organized around the nodal signifier “urban justice.” However, this concept is articulated primarily within a physical–distributive framework, emphasizing infrastructure development, service provision, and managerial efficiency. Within this semantic structure, key components of space-based gender justice -such as women’s differentiated mobility patterns in relation to the gendered division of labor, safety, and everyday experience in public spaces, and social inclusion- are either absent or recoded through generic and de-gendered signifiers (e.g., “security” and “family”). Accordingly, gender justice is not advanced as an independent claim; rather, through discursive mechanisms of de-gendering and marginalization, it is excluded from the chain of equivalence associated with “urban justice.” This suggests that the dominant techno-economic development paradigm remains prevalent in Tehran’s urban planning, and that achieving inclusive urban justice requires redefining planning indicators and objectives through gender-aware and space-based approaches.

Keywords: *Space-based gender justice, Urban planning, Tehran’s Fourth Urban Progress Plan, Discourse analysis, Feminist theories of space*

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Introduction and Problem Statement

In recent decades, attention to gender justice has become one of the key axes of debate in urban theory and policy-making. Nevertheless, despite the substantial expansion of feminist research on the city and space, gender remains under-recognized in many theories and practical approaches to urban planning. As Beebeejaun notes, “despite significant progress over decades of feminist research, gender remains neglected in theorising and in the practical implementation of processes shaping cities” (Beebeejaun, 2017, 323). Consequently, many urban environments face serious shortcomings in responding to women’s differentiated needs, experiences, and challenges and, in practice, “fail to attend to women’s diverse needs, experiences and challenges” (Letsoko et al., 2025, 469). This occurs at a time when the persistence of women’s economic and social marginalisation, alongside the prevalence of various forms of violence against them, has made attention to the gendered dimensions of urban spaces more pressing than ever (Beebeejaun, 2017, 323).

One of the main reasons for this condition can be traced to the dominance of approaches that treat urban space as neutral and homogeneous. Within such perspectives, the city is imagined as an environment devoid of gender differentiation, whereas in practice, many planning and urban design patterns have been shaped by androcentric assumptions. The outcome is the production of spaces that, often implicitly, “ignore or marginalise women’s needs, mobility patterns, and everyday experiences” (Sadeghi et al., 2012, 83), thereby rendering their spatial experience secondary. By contrast, feminist perspectives in urban studies demonstrate that space is not merely a physical container for activities; rather, it is produced through social relations and structures of power. From this standpoint, spatial inequalities may both reflect and reproduce social and gendered orders (Young, 1990).

Accordingly, many urban planning theorists have emphasized the need to rethink the processes of urban planning and decision-making. Within this framework, the realization of spatial justice is considered incomplete without attention to gender justice, because women’s experience of the city -closely tied to such issues as access to services, safety, mobility patterns, and social

reproduction- is structurally overlooked in many urban policies and plans. Therefore, achieving a just city requires a participatory and democratic planning process capable of recognizing the structural differences and lived experiences of diverse social groups, including women (Young, 1990; Healey, 1997).

However, a review of the existing literature shows that the incorporation of gender justice into urban studies, both internationally and in Iran, has often been fragmented, case-specific, and theoretically inconsistent, such that a large proportion of studies have either remained limited to describing spatial inequalities or have merely offered short-term practical solutions. As a result, “gender equality has been treated less as a foundational principle guiding urban planning and more as a peripheral or complementary concern within existing policies” (Letsoko et al., 2025, 469).

This issue becomes even more acute and problematic in the context of urban planning in Iran. Historically, Iran’s urban planning system has been shaped within a centralized, state-led, and top-down paradigm (Barati et al., 2019, 5; Karimzadeh et al., 2019, 528). This paradigm has relied less on democratic processes, the recognition of social differences, and the meaningful participation of diverse social groups, and more on physical interventions, the logic of service distribution, and quantitative responses (for example, the Tehran Five-Year Development Plan, 2019–2023, and the Tehran Five-Year Progress Plan, 2022–2025). Within such a context, concepts such as gender justice -which are processual, structural, and political in nature- have remained without the necessary conceptual tools for effective entry into the system of urban planning and policy-making.

A review of the research background in Iran also confirms this gap. A considerable body of studies has focused on describing gender inequalities in the urban fabric and women’s lived experiences of urban spaces (Roumina et al., 2018; Enayatizadeh et al., 2024). Although these studies have played an important role in revealing manifestations of gender inequality, they have largely neglected analysis of the planning mechanisms, decision-making logics, and power relations that produce and reproduce these inequalities. By contrast,

some studies, focusing on spatial interventions or executive policies, have critiqued common solutions such as spatial segregation or compensatory measures (Safari et al, 2021; Jami Odolo et al., 2023), yet because they do not engage with the dominant discourse and the institutional processes of planning, they have not been able to arrive at a structural understanding of the issue.

At a broader level, another group of studies has critiqued the paradigm and structure of Iran's urban planning system, identifying its centralized, undemocratic, and development-oriented character as one of the principal factors in the reproduction of social inequalities (Barati et al., 2019; Karimzadeh et al., 2019). Likewise, Dadashpoor & Alvandipour (2016), by criticizing the dominance of the distributive approach in Iranian studies of spatial justice, have shown that the absence of structured theoretical frameworks has reduced justice to a quantitative, service-oriented issue and removed processes, power relations, and social actors from the field of analysis. Although studies such as Rafiian et al. (2014) have taken an important step toward identifying and assessing indicators of justice-oriented public spaces with an emphasis on gender, their focus has still remained on evaluating outcomes and has not led to the formulation of a coherent theoretical rationale capable of guiding urban planning.

From this perspective, it can be argued that the main problem is not the lack of evidence but rather the absence of a coherent conceptual framework capable of simultaneously explaining spatial gender inequalities, revealing their structural roots within Iran's urban planning system, and functioning as an analytical guide for the study of policy documents and urban development plans. The absence of such a framework has meant that gender justice, despite its scattered presence in certain policies and official discourses, has failed to become a foundational criterion in urban planning decision-making.

In this regard, in order to understand how gender justice is represented in urban policies, it is necessary to move beyond the analysis of physical indicators or the spatial distribution of services and instead examine the discourse governing urban planning documents. In this context, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (1985)

makes it possible to investigate how dominant discourses are formed and stabilized in policy texts. By focusing on such concepts as nodal signifiers, chains of equivalence, and hegemonic processes, this approach shows how certain concepts become foregrounded in urban planning discourse while others -including gender justice- are marginalized.

Accordingly, with the aim of filling this conceptual gap, the present study first develops a conceptual framework for "space-based gender justice" on the basis of the feminist theoretical literature on space. In the second step, the components of this conceptual framework are employed as an analytical basis for examining the discourse articulated in Tehran's Fourth Urban Progress Plan (Islamic City Council of Tehran, 2023), in order to clarify how the concepts of justice, development, and gender are articulated in this policy document.

In light of this approach, the main research questions are as follows: How is the conceptual framework of space-based gender justice in urban planning formulated? How are the components of space-based gender justice represented or marginalized in the discourse of Tehran's Fourth Urban Progress Plan? Addressing these questions can contribute to a deeper understanding of the discursive mechanisms shaping urban policies in Iran and provide a basis for rethinking the theoretical and policy frameworks related to gender justice in urban planning.

Theoretical Reflections

• Feminist theories of urban space

Linda McDowell (1983), critiquing descriptive approaches in urban studies, argues that urban space is not neutral; rather, it reflects and reproduces gendered power relations in society. In her view, conventional urban planning has largely been based on the model of the "male worker" and the linear home-work commute, and as a result, it overlooks women's more complex mobility patterns. This condition is linked to the relationship between the spheres of production (waged work) and reproduction (domestic and care work), in which reproductive responsibilities are predominantly borne by women. Consequently, the city's spatial structure is shaped in ways that are often incompatible with women's everyday needs. McDowell

emphasizes that this spatial division is the product of patriarchal structures and takes different forms across societies and historical periods.

Doreen Massey (1994) extends this discussion by conceptualizing space and place not merely as settings for social action but as integral to the production of social relations themselves. From her perspective, gender inequalities become stabilized within the spatial structures of the city; therefore, urban planning can either reproduce or mitigate these inequalities. For instance, the inappropriate location of urban services, inadequate street lighting, or unequal access to urban facilities can constrain women's spatial experience. Massey also highlights the role of flows of power and capital in organizing space, showing that rapid economic development and the concentration of amenities in particular areas may create opportunities for some groups while generating constraints for others -especially women. From this standpoint, achieving gender justice requires that the design and organization of urban spaces take women's lived experience and everyday needs into account.

Leslie Kern (2020), focusing on the physical design of the city, demonstrates that much urban infrastructure and many urban spaces have been shaped around masculine needs and life patterns. She argues that neglecting women's needs in the design of public transport, housing, and public spaces can entrench gender inequalities within the city's physical structure. For Kern, women's fear in urban environments is not merely an individual feeling; it is a rational response to unsafe spatial design, such as deserted streets, poor lighting, or blind spots in urban architecture. These conditions can restrict women's presence in public spaces. Kern also emphasizes the importance of attending to differences among women in terms of social class, age, and physical ability, arguing that urban development programs must address the needs of diverse groups of women.

• Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a theoretical and methodological approach for studying the production and stabilization of meaning in social phenomena. Within this approach, language is not understood merely as a tool for conveying meaning, but as a form of social action that plays a constitutive role in the formation

of social realities (Fairclough, 1989, 17). Discourses consist of sets of meanings, concepts, and practices through which identities, social relations, and ways of understanding the world are formed (Torfing, 1999; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002/2015). Accordingly, discourse analysis seeks to show how meanings become stabilized within a social context and how certain interpretations come to be accepted as dominant or natural.

The theoretical framework of the present study is grounded in the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. In this theory, the social field is understood as a network of meaning-making processes in which discourses seek to stabilize meaning. Within each discourse, a set of signs is linked together through a process known as "articulation," thereby forming a system of meaning. This system is typically organized around a "nodal signifier," a signifier that plays a structuring and unifying role for the other concepts within the discourse. Other signs are connected to this nodal signifier through "chains of equivalence," reinforcing and extending its meaning.

Within this framework, the identity of each discourse is formed through differentiation from the "other" or from rival discourses, a process referred to as "othering." In order to stabilize themselves, discourses foreground certain concepts and meanings while marginalizing others. Meaning, therefore, is always partial and contingent, and remains open to contestation and redefinition. Another important concept in this theory is the "empty signifier," a sign whose semantic indeterminacy allows it to be filled with different meanings by different discourses. This feature enables discourses to employ broad and polysemic concepts in order to stabilize their hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002/2015). On this basis, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis provides a useful tool for examining how meanings are formed and stabilized in texts and policies, and for showing how some concepts are placed at the center of discourse while others are pushed to the margins.

Research Methodology

The methodology of this study is organized into two main stages. In the first stage, the conceptual framework

of “space-based gender justice” is developed through an analytical–deductive approach grounded in axiomatic principles. This approach functions as a tool for reasoning and for the theoretical organization of ideas, enabling the extraction of shared principles across different perspectives and their integration into a coherent framework (Nabavi, 2005, 216). In this process, logical deduction is employed to identify relationships among theoretical propositions on the basis of rational rules, thereby generating new conceptual outcomes. Drawing on Jabareen’s (2009) model, the conceptual framework is constructed in four steps: (1) extracting foundational concepts from feminist theories of space; (2) formulating axioms as basic propositions; (3) establishing conceptual relations among these axioms through logical inference; and (4) articulating the final framework, including the analytical dimensions and key components of space-based gender justice. The outcome of this stage is a set of conceptual components encompassing dimensions such as mobility patterns shaped by the gendered division of labor; the material-spatial reproduction of gender inequalities; women’s safety and spatial experience; social inclusion and intra-group differences; and the ways in which urban development is defined.

In the second stage, this conceptual framework is used as the analytical basis for examining the discursive articulation of Tehran’s Fourth Urban Progress Plan (2022–2025), and the analysis is conducted based on Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse approach. At this stage, the plan’s discursive meaning structure is explored by identifying its main elements; that is, the nodal signifier of the discourse, the chains of equivalence linking surrounding concepts, the forms of othering, and the empty signifiers in the plan text are extracted and analyzed. The analysis focuses on clarifying how the concept of “urban justice” is articulated in the plan, which concepts are stabilized around it, and, conversely, what position the components of space-based gender justice occupy within this meaning structure.

In this way, the conceptual framework derived in the deductive stage is operationalized as analytical codes in the discourse-analysis stage. This enables the study to move beyond merely identifying the presence or absence of gender justice in planning documents and

to explain the discursive mechanisms through which it is reproduced or marginalized within the urban development plan.

Research Findings

• Presenting the conceptual framework of space-based gender justice

The findings of this study are grounded in the analysis and integration of feminist theories of space. Through this analysis, the conceptual framework of “space-based gender justice” is derived. This framework seeks to demonstrate how the city’s spatial organization can reflect gendered power relations, and how urban planning can contribute to reducing gender inequalities through the redefinition and reorganization of space.

Extraction of concepts and foundational principles: In the first step, key concepts were extracted from three theoretical approaches linking space and gender. From McDowell’s perspective, the concept of the gendered division of space and its connection to the separation between productive and reproductive labor is central: urban planning based on the male, linear commute model overlooks the multi-nodal patterns of women’s everyday lives. From Massey’s perspective, space is understood as a social and relational structure in which power relations and gender inequalities become stabilized in the material form of the city; therefore, gender inequality can be concretely manifested in physical urban elements such as accessibility, lighting, infrastructure, and the distribution of services. From Kern’s perspective, the notion of the feminist city is emphasized, focusing on women’s lived experience in space, the issue of safety, and the necessity of urban design that is sensitive to gendered, class-based, and broader social differences.

Shared axioms: By combining the extracted concepts, a set of foundational propositions was formulated as the shared axioms of the space-based gender justice framework: urban spaces are not neutral; rather, they reflect social and gendered power relations; patterns of urban spatial organization can reproduce the gendered division of labor and everyday life; when ignored in policymaking, gender inequalities become stabilized in the materiality of urban space; women’s lived experience –especially in relation to safety, access, and mobility

patterns- must serve as a basis for urban design and planning; and gender justice requires attention to intra-group differences among women and to the diversity of their social, economic, and physical conditions.

Conceptual inference: Through logical inference across these axioms, the relationships among the different dimensions of space-based gender justice become clear. From the first and second axioms, it can be inferred that the city's spatial structure is directly shaped by the gendered division of labor and by power relations. From the third and fourth axioms, it follows that ignoring women's spatial needs in urban development programs leads to the consolidation of inequality in the city's physical structure. Further, the fifth axiom implies that gender-justice analysis cannot treat women as a homogeneous group; rather, it must also account for differences in class, age, and physical ability.

Formulating the conceptual framework: Based on these inferences, the conceptual framework of space-based gender justice is organized into several analytical dimensions. The first dimension concerns mobility patterns and the gendered division of labor, highlighting that the city's spatial organization should be compatible with the multi-nodal rhythms of women's everyday lives. The second dimension addresses the material-spatial reproduction of gender inequalities, emphasizing the role of urban design and the distribution of infrastructure in shaping spatial experience. The third dimension focuses on women's safety and spatial perception, showing how the quality of public-space design can influence women's presence or absence in the city. The fourth dimension is dedicated to social inclusion and attention to intra-group differences among women. The fifth dimension concerns how "urban development" is defined -namely, whether development is confined to physical and economic growth or also includes human dimensions and gender justice.

On this basis, space-based gender justice means that urban opportunities, resources, services, and infrastructures across all urban spaces should be designed and organized in ways that enable equal access, spatial safety, and the possibility of use that corresponds to the differing life patterns of women and men. The conceptual framework developed through this

process provides an analytical foundation for examining how gender justice is represented -and what position it occupies- within urban development documents.

• **Discourse analysis of Tehran's Fourth Urban Progress Plan from the Perspective of Space-Based Gender Justice (2022–2025)**

Before turning to the analysis of the discursive articulations of Tehran's Fourth Urban Progress Plan (2022–2025), it must be emphasized that explicit references to "women" in the text of the plan are limited and can mainly be traced in a few specific provisions (Articles 93, 94, 95, and 96). However, these limited references do not necessarily indicate the stabilization of "gender justice" as an independent and organizing signifier within the plan's dominant articulation. Rather, they suggest that the issue of women is primarily articulated through broader and less contentious signifiers such as "family," "empowerment," "security," and "livability," and is absorbed into the chain of equivalence surrounding the central signifier of "urban justice" without being elevated to the level of an autonomous structural and policy demand.

The Nodal Signifier of the Dominant Discourse: The nodal signifier of the dominant discourse in Tehran's Fourth Urban Progress Plan (2022–2025) is "urban justice." In the text, this signifier is articulated through a chain of broader concepts such as sustainable development, the distribution of services and facilities, public participation, smartization, and public welfare. As a result, justice is mainly stabilized within an economic-material and distributive reading. In other words, rather than addressing power relations, the recognition of social differences, or the removal of inequalities experienced in everyday life, justice is largely reduced to "equal access" and the "balanced distribution" of urban resources and services.

The Position of Gender Justice in the Chain of Equivalence: Within the dominant chain of equivalence, organized around the nodal signifier of "urban justice," gender justice is not stabilized as an independent, necessary, and structuring signifier. Although references to women appear in a few limited provisions (Articles 93 to 96), these references are mainly framed within broader and less contentious signifiers such as "family,"

“empowerment,” “security,” and “livability,” and do not rise to the level of a structural or policy demand. Thus, issues such as gender-responsive transportation, women’s everyday safety in public spaces, the institutionalized participation of women, or gender-aware design and budgeting do not emerge as explicit dimensions of justice in the plan.

By contrast, the signifiers equivalently linked around “urban justice” include the development of public transportation, environmental protection, the rehabilitation of deteriorated urban fabric, the enhancement of security in a general/technical sense, the smartization of urban management, citizen participation, and the fair distribution of services. Therefore, gender justice is neither present as an equivalent element within the dominant chain nor established as a necessary dimension capable of gendering these concepts -for example, in terms of gendered safety, women’s effective participation, or gender-responsive access to services.

Othering and the Marginalization of Gender Justice: The plan’s dominant discourse, centered on “urban justice” in a distributive-technical reading, marginalizes gender justice not through complete omission, but through mechanisms of articulation and meaning stabilization: 1) Gender-neutral articulation of key signifiers: Signifiers such as “security,” “transportation,” “participation,” and “access” are mostly formulated in universalistic terms that remain indifferent to gender differences. As a result, security is stabilized largely within general or technical readings -such as safety, crisis management, and harm control- while women’s everyday safety in public spaces is pushed to the margins as a structural issue; 2) Naturalization and depoliticization of the existing gender order: Through its silence regarding the gendered division of labor (reproductive/productive), care responsibilities, and women’s distinct mobility patterns and temporalities in the city, the plan represents gender-based spatial inequalities as natural and non-contentious. In this way, these inequalities are effectively excluded from the field of policymaking; 3) Closure of alternative articulatory possibilities: Competing discourses of gender justice -including feminist urban theories and experiences, gender-aware and intersectional approaches, and the requirements of gender-sensitive design and budgeting-

are not transformed into legitimate sources of meaning within the plan text. This discursive silence stabilizes the boundaries of what can and cannot be said in favor of the dominant discourse, and thus itself functions as a mechanism of marginalization.

Empty Signifiers and the Discursive Gap: Some apparently inclusive signifiers in the text of the plan, such as “public participation,” “justice in the distribution of services,” and “urban security,” possess considerable hegemonic capacity to represent diverse demands. Yet in the absence of an explicit articulation of gender justice, they become stabilized as gender-neutral and limited signifiers. “Public participation,” without guaranteeing the structured, safe, and effective presence of women -especially women from marginalized groups- can easily reproduce formal, elite-centered, and male-dominated patterns of participation. Likewise, “justice in the distribution of services,” in the absence of an analysis of differences in needs, temporalities, and gendered barriers to access, is reduced to the quantitative and apparently equal distribution of resources, and fails to confront the qualitative inequalities embedded in women’s lived experience of the city. Similarly, when “urban security” is stabilized mainly through general and technical readings such as safety, crisis management, or harm control, it sidelines women’s everyday safety in public spaces. From this perspective, the issue is not the total absence of these signifiers, but the limits of their articulation -limits that reveal the gap between the universalist claim of urban justice and the actual boundaries of its inclusiveness.

In sum, the dominant articulation in Tehran’s Fourth Urban Progress Plan, by foregrounding the nodal signifier of “urban justice” within a predominantly economic-material reading, does not stabilize gender justice as an independent and organizing signifier within its chain of equivalence. In this text, gender is not entirely omitted, but is primarily absorbed into broader and less contentious signifiers such as “participation,” “security,” “family,” and “livability.” Through this articulation, gendered spatial inequalities appear less as political and structural issues and more as marginal concerns within the dominant reading of urban justice. For this reason, seemingly inclusive signifiers such as “participation” and

“security,” in the absence of an explicit articulation of gender differences and inequalities, are emptied of gender-aware content and lose their transformative potential for redefining urban justice in an alternative way.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a significant disjuncture between the conceptual framework of “space-based gender justice” and the dominant discourse of Tehran’s Fourth Urban Progress Plan. This mismatch is not merely related to the limited number of explicit references to women in the text of the plan; rather, it stems from the very way in which the plan understands space, justice, and urban development. Whereas the study’s conceptual framework, drawing on feminist theories of space, understands space as a social construct deeply embedded in gendered power relations, Tehran’s Fourth Urban Progress Plan largely treats space as a neutral platform for the distribution of services, the implementation of development projects, and the enhancement of managerial efficiency. As a result, urban justice in the plan is understood primarily in terms of the quantitative distribution of resources and infrastructure rather than in relation to the lived experiences of different social groups, especially women.

The discourse analysis showed that “urban justice” is the nodal signifier of the plan, but this signifier is articulated within a chain of economic, material, and managerial concepts such as infrastructure development, urban renewal, public transportation, smartization, and the distribution of services. Within this structure, the components of space-based gender justice -including women’s differentiated mobility patterns, everyday safety in public spaces, the role of care work, and intra-group differences among women- do not occupy a meaningful place. For example, urban transportation in the plan is concerned mainly with increasing capacity and reducing travel time, without attending to the multi-purpose and complex mobility patterns of women. Similarly, security is framed primarily in its general and technical sense, such as crisis management and harm reduction, rather than as a gendered experience of everyday spatial use.

These findings indicate that the plan marginalizes

gender justice through the degendering of key concepts. Concepts such as participation, access, and security appear inclusive on the surface, but in the absence of an explicit articulation of gender differences, they become gender-neutral signifiers with limited capacity to redefine spatial inequalities. From the perspective of Laclau and Mouffe, this suggests that the hegemony of the dominant discourse is established not only through the privileging of certain concepts but also through restricting the possibility of articulating alternative discourses. In the Fourth Plan, gender justice is not entirely omitted; rather, it is absorbed and neutralized within broader and less contentious signifiers such as “family,” “security,” and “participation.”

Accordingly, the main issue in this plan is not the complete absence of concepts related to women, but the absence of gender justice as an organizing logic in the definition of urban justice. As a result, the plan remains within a technical and distributive rationality that, although it speaks of justice, participation, and welfare, lacks the capacity to address the real inequalities experienced in the city because it fails to engage with the gendered structures of space. For this reason, redefining urban justice through the lens of space-based gender justice is a necessary condition for moving toward a more inclusive and equitable model of urban planning.

Conclusion

This study aimed to clarify the position of gender justice in urban planning. In the first step, it formulated a conceptual framework of “space-based gender justice” on the basis of feminist theories of space. In the second step, it employed this framework as an analytical foundation for examining the discourse of Tehran’s Fourth Urban Progress Plan. The analysis indicates that although “urban justice” is present in this document as the central concept, space-based gender justice is not stabilized in the plan’s dominant articulation as an independent and organizing signifier and is largely relegated to the margins.

The first contribution of the study is the development of a conceptual framework for understanding gender justice in relation to space. This framework does not limit policy assessment to the mere “mention/non-

mention of women"; instead, it focuses on evaluating the spatial implications of policies for the lived experiences of different groups -especially women. It conceptualizes gender justice as comprising interrelated dimensions that can be used as evaluative criteria in the analysis of urban policy documents.

The second contribution is to demonstrate the discursive mechanism through which gender justice becomes marginal in a specific policy document. The findings show that gender is addressed in the plan not necessarily through complete omission, but through broader, less contentious formulations, in ways that constrain the possibility of articulating gender justice as a distinct and actionable demand within the policy text. From this perspective, the study's innovation lies in revealing how marginalization occurs -namely, how the plan, by stabilizing a dominant logic of justice, reduces the capacity for an alternative articulation of space-based gender justice.

Finally, the results carry a clear policy implication: moving toward gender justice in urban management and planning cannot be achieved by merely adding a few provisions or scattered references. Rather, gender-responsive criteria must be incorporated at the levels of problem definition, objectives, evaluation indicators, and implementation mechanisms. Applying feminist approaches to space in urban policymaking can facilitate a shift from generalized invocations of justice toward planning that is genuinely inclusive and responsive to differences in citizens' spatial experience.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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