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## Original Research Article

# Regenerating Historical Contexts, with an Approach to Enhancing Urban Livability

Ali Khaksar<sup>1\*</sup>, Elahe Mahdavi<sup>2</sup>

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Advanced Research in Art, Faculty of Visual Arts, College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.
2. Master of Art Research, Department of Advanced Research in Art, , Faculty of Visual Arts, College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

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## Abstract

Historical contexts are considered among the most valuable urban contexts, which over time, with the development of cities and the wear and tear of historical cores, have declined in terms of quality of life. This is while urban restoration has now reached urban regeneration in its evolutionary periods. On the other hand, among the existing approaches in urban planning, considering urban livability for regeneration has led to more interaction between the historical context and the city and its citizens. With this description, the main question and problem of this research is how to increase livability by regenerating historical contexts in a way that citizens experience a suitable quality of life in the contexts and do not intend to leave it. Therefore, the ultimate goal of this research is to identify factors that increase livability in regenerating historical contexts. To achieve the research objectives, this research has explored the subject based on the qualitative research method and specifically the descriptive-analytical method. Accordingly, the results of the research admit that livability has environmental and cultural factors that each group can save historical contexts from wear and tear and return them to urban life. Multiple factors such as improving security, improving urban services and facilities, proper access to public transportation, strengthening a sense of belonging to a place, and improving health conditions are among the reasons for increasing livability in historical contexts. These factors will not only increase the quality of life in these contexts but also protect them as a historical heritage.

**Keywords:** *Regeneration, Livability, Historical Context, Urban Restoration.*

## Introduction

The quality of the living environment is one of the effective factors on the human spirit and his attitude towards the environment. Low-quality urban contexts have been emptied of residents over time and as a result, their vitality and livability have decreased. New urban restoration approaches are trying to coordinate between spatial and social aspects and thus improve the quality of life of

citizens. It is clear that one of the most important urban contexts is the historical one. The old context of cities, due to the presence of valuable elements of architectural and urban heritage, suitable communicative position and also being located around the main city market, has a special place in the spatial and functional structure of the city. In this regard, solving the existing problems in these contexts, organizing them, and intervening has become necessary. Today, due to the dominance of profit-oriented thinking in

\* corresponding author: alikhaksar@ut.ac.ir; +98 9304193050

the urban context, residential spaces in historical contexts have been extensively destroyed. Inappropriate physical interventions have reduced their livability and vitality and caused the creation of insecure contexts that do not have a desirable quality of living and are less coherent. In addition to this, with the formation of new urban contexts, many historical and old contexts have been abandoned and become uninhabitable. These contexts, despite having strengths, have faced many changes and gradually suffered from disturbances in various social, functional, economic, physical, communicative, and environmental dimensions. Basically, regenerating these contexts has limitations and problems. These problems include inconsistency of activity, the existence of inconsistent urban elements, lack of quota for some uses such as leisure spaces, incompatible uses, and traffic attractors, lack of proper hierarchy in the communication network and inability to penetrate organic context, existence of abandoned and defenseless spaces, lack of desirable public spaces for creating social interactions, disorder and disruption in land use system, environmental pollution, location of some parts of the context within the scope of historical monuments and inadequate construction regulations in it and gradual exit of capital and activity followed by replacement of residential use with very low quality which has reduced the importance of old context as city identity makers (Pourahmad, Habibi & Keshavarz, 2010). Now with this description, the main question and problem of this research is how to increase livability in it by regenerating historical contexts so that citizens experience a suitable quality of life by living in it.

### Research Methodology

The present research is applied in nature because by using the results of the studies, historical contexts can be saved from the danger of destruction and returned to urban life. In this research, a qualitative research method and specifically a descriptive-analytical research method were used, which is based on two stages. First, existing studies considering the foundations of regeneration were analyzed, and in the second stage, the processes of livability of historical

contexts were examined. On the other hand, the method of collecting information is based on library documents and by reviewing theoretical texts, including definitions and reviewing the views and theories of thinkers, the concepts needed for research have been provided. And finally, with an inductive method and by putting information together, the final analysis has been done.

### Research Background

Among the research related to regeneration and urban livability, one of the latest research projects in historical contexts is an article titled “Monitoring Regeneration Components to Improve the Quality of the Environment in Historical Neighborhoods Based on Expert’s Approach (Case Study: Historical Neighborhoods of Shiraz)” in which factors affecting regeneration in historical neighborhoods of Shiraz have been prioritized using multi-criteria decision-making methods. The authors have evaluated the economic, social, physical, spatial, activation, participation, heritage, time, and place components in regenerating Shiraz’s historical neighborhoods from the perspective of urban planning and architecture experts. This research has shown that the economic component has the highest priority and the physical component has the lowest one. Also, the authors have suggested practical strategies in three economic, social, and physical dimensions to improve environmental quality in Shiraz’s historical neighborhoods (Nasr & Nikoonam Nezami, 2022). In the article “Measurement and evaluation of cultural-social regeneration projects of public spaces with the approach of improving environmental quality and neighborhood identity (case study: Kashan city’s historical sidewalks) the authors using multi-indicator decision-making methods, indicators of neighborhood authenticity, sense of belonging, aesthetics, social interactions, The livability and security have been measured in the studied area and the results have been compared with the applicable standards. The results have shown that the status of many indicators is in an unfavorable or semi-optimal state and the regeneration of public spaces alone cannot lead to the improvement of the quality of the environment and the identity of the

neighborhood. Therefore, the authors have proposed practical strategies in economic, social and physical aspects to solve the existing problems and challenges (Heidary Sureshjani, Vafayi & Doolatyan, 2022). In an article titled “Compilation of the Conceptual Framework of Livability Criteria in the Historical Context (Case Study: District 12 of Tehran)”, authors have collected quantitative and qualitative data through questionnaires and interviews with experts and residents of historical neighborhoods using analytical and descriptive methods. And analyzed with “SPSS” software. The results show that livability criteria in a historical context include economic, social, physical, spatial, activation, participation, heritage, time, and place components. Also, authors have suggested strategies based on the prioritization of these components for improving livability indicators in District 12 of Tehran city (Safari Yazd, Ziyari, Ziviar & Behzad, 2022). In an article titled “A Comparative Study of Livability in New and Old Parts of the Cities (Case Study: Urmia city)”, the authors have examined the level of livability in old and new contexts of Urmia city. For this purpose, 12 indicators including building quality, access to various uses, population density, land price, etc. have been selected and weighted using multi-criteria decision-making methods Best-Worst. The results show that livability in the old context of Urmia city is higher than new context. Also, some indicators are better in the old context and some others are better in the new context (Khezerlou & Abedini, 2022). These cases and other research today have led to improved regeneration results and improved quality of livability indicators and also form the basis for future research. In this research urban livability as an approach that is more used in modern urban planning has been considered for regenerating historical contexts and related factors have been studied. Considering this approach for historical context examines the needs of today’s residents of context and not as a museum-like context, but in interaction with the current urban life flow, which will lead to its promotion. In this case, the historical context has continued its life in the course of developments that have taken place over the years and continues this life cycle with the needs of today’s residents.

### Examined Urban Samples

Regenerating historical context with an approach to increase livability is one of the effective ways to preserve and revive the cultural and historical values of cities that have been carried out in different parts of the world. Here are a few examples of these projects:

“Ciutat Vella”, the center of Barcelona, is a dense area that was the center of urban activities until the mid-nineteenth century and today consists of various neighborhood units. In the 1980s, Barcelona’s urban governance decided to take an urban regeneration approach. The overall goal of urban regeneration in Barcelona was cultural regeneration, which resulted in two minor goals: changing the inappropriate image of the central part in public minds and attracting young people and economic activists to the area. In this regard, the most important actions taken are: creating a cultural center, transferring faculties of Barcelona University to the central part, and building Olympic-related complexes in areas adjacent to the central part, which has improved context quality (Hanachi, Khademzade, Shayan, Kamelnia & Mahdavinejad, 2007). Culture-centered regeneration projects in Turkey include Galata Port (1998), Haydarpassa Port (2003), and Kartal area (2013). In all these projects, preserving and showing the cultural and historical heritage of the area was one of the priorities. These areas are among Turkey’s most famous historical and tourist-friendly contexts. In these experiences using the culture-centered urban regeneration method, creative cultural industries such as handicrafts, painting, photography, and music have been used as attractive factors and enhancers of city space. Preventing displacement and not replacing new residents in a historical context are other points that have been considered to strengthen a sense of belonging. Therefore, we should benefit from the experiences gained from new samples (Karimzadeh, Shahriari & Ardeshiri, 2017). If there is not enough attention to the values of historical context during regeneration operations, the final result will not be approved by experts and will not be liked by residents. One of the recent regenerations in the historical context of Iran has been regenerating

“Atiq Square” in Isfahan. Among criticisms made about how to recreate this square known by names like Kohne Square, Atiq Square, Sabzeh Square, and Imam Ali (AS) Square are purely physical reconstruction and failure of officials to return activities and urban functions to the square, dissatisfaction with occupants and owners from reconstruction process of the square, lack of opportunity for social actors and ineffective square in expanding public solidarity and social participation. Therefore, we should benefit from experiences gained from new samples (Jafari Jebeli, Musakazemi, Hekmatnia & Mokhtari, 2022).

### Regenerating Historical Context

The word “Regeneration” in English, means the natural reproduction of a part of a living entity that has been destroyed (Roberts & Sykes, 2000 as cited in Azizi & Behra, 2017). Regeneration, as a term, includes other concepts such as renovation, reconstruction, modernization, empowerment, and revival. In urban regeneration, the new urban space, while preserving the original features of the functional space, leads to its efficiency (Habibi & Maqsoodi, 2007, 15). Regeneration refers to a set of activities to improve people’s living standards through cooperation and empowerment of local resources and citizen participation in places that lack economic, social, cultural, or infrastructural resources (Rabbiosi, Coletti & Salone, 2020). In fact, urban regeneration is preserving the valuable features of the old context, creating new features appropriate to today’s needs, and redefining past values to respond to today’s needs (Hanachi et al., 2007, 15). Therefore, among the various concepts and functions in the field of urban restoration, regeneration is the best option for intervention in historical contexts. Because it both defends the values of historical context and strives to interact with the current city context. Due to the complexity of urban regeneration programs, their nature is very different from other urban development programs, especially considering existing uncertainties. Because there are multiple beneficiaries and agents such as

government organizations and local government, private developers, and local communities involved in planning these matters, several conflicts and inconsistencies may occur among beneficiaries over the implementation of a policy that requires agent participation due to complex relationships. The results of these inconsistencies will be delaying the implementation schedule, reducing efficiency, increasing costs, and desirability (Carley, 2000; Yu & Lee, 2012). Recreational and protective actions of historical contexts are always accompanied by two different approaches: static approach and dynamic approach. In a static approach, buildings and existing uses that have historical values are protected and equipped for future generations if possible. In a dynamic approach, historical context develops, is reconstructed and is considered as an integral part of the regeneration process (Hasanzadeh & Soltanzadeh, 2016). Given that this research is aimed at increasing livability in historical contexts, it has specifically chosen a dynamic approach as a theoretical framework.

### Urban Livability

Livability, in its original and general sense, refers to the concept of achieving livability. In fact, it is the same as achieving the desired quality of urban planning with a sustainable location. Urban livability is achieved through ecological sustainability, environmental vitality, solving social, economic, cultural and environmental problems. In general, the quality of life of citizens depends on their access to transportation, infrastructure, water, communications, food, health, suitable housing, clean air, green space and parks. The livability of a residence also depends on the extent to which residents have access to participate in the decision-making process to meet their needs (Timmer & Seymour, 2005). If the city is considered a living being, it needs vitality and livability to continue its life. The role of urban spaces, spaces in which the social interactions of citizens occur and the culture of society is reflected in them, is declining day by day in historical contexts. Obviously, the prerequisite for livability and vitality is the presence of people. Today,

for various reasons, the worn-out historical contexts of the city have been emptied of people's presence and activity. This is while if these contexts have a safe, vibrant and desirable space and in them healthy and vibrant regenerations are organized in an organized manner and in accordance with the values of society, the active presence of people and consequently livability and vitality will increase (Habibi, 2014).

In a general summary, the types of livability from Charles Landry's point of view are divided into two types of environmental livability and cultural livability. Environmental viability includes two aspects. The first is ecological sustainability, which is measured by variables such as air and sound pollution, disposal of waste materials and sewage, mass traffic and green space, and the second aspect is design, which is measured by variables such as legibility, sense of place, architectural distinction, connection and communication of different parts of the city, quality It includes lighting and how friendly, safe and psychologically approachable the urban environment is, and cultural livability includes survival, respect and celebration of the city and its people, identity, memories, tradition, social celebrations, production, distribution and consumption. Handmade products and signs that express the distinctive nature of the city (Landry, 2000, 12-28).

### **Influential Components in Enhancing Urban Livability in the Regeneration of Historical Context**

Regeneration is an approach towards inner-city development and is the use of potential and actual capabilities in urban planning, coordination among the foundations of social life, striving to create balance in the distribution of population quality and quantity, escaping from urban poverty, and ultimately using social momentum and people's companionship (Nourian & Ariana 2012). This participation and cooperation will be the first step towards increasing the livability of the context. It can be said that regeneration with the concept of the stated theoretical framework overlaps with many

aspects of livability. When regenerating a historical context, it should always be kept in mind that scattered and temporary actions that have been taken based on purely economic and functional views of city officials and managers have faced worn-out urban contexts with problems such as physical abnormalities, urban poverty, lack of security and safety for residents, lack of services, decreased social status and decreased economic value. In addition to this, the excessive expansion of worn-out contexts and the lack of clear strategies and scientific and comprehensive future-oriented views in planning, management, and reduction of these contexts have caused livability in them to decrease significantly (Hataminejad, Pourahmad & Nosrati Heshi, 2019). Among the components affecting the increase in the livability of historical context are personal and social security, identity and sense of belonging to the place, suitable housing, access to welfare facilities, educational, health services and a desirable and efficient transportation system to facilitate access to other parts of the city. In general, each of the mentioned components can be placed in one of the two categories of environmental livability and cultural livability. In terms of social and individual security, it should be noted that if historical contexts have gradually become worn out on a large scale, they will be an insecure and crime-prone environment. If these areas are not properly cared for due to design weaknesses or even poor lighting, it will cause problems for residents that may eventually lead to leaving the context. In this regard, measures can be taken to increase livability in terms of security by widening passages and providing adequate lighting for them. Creating uses that require people's participation to perform activities that result in positive gatherings, and finally, if necessary, considering the role of guardianship until valuable changes in regeneration are fully implemented and there is no need for a deterrent factor. In terms of economy, to increase the livability of the historical context, residents' financial participation in the regeneration project should be facilitated, and creating multiple job opportunities in the neighborhood should be considered in its program

which indirectly increases security in context. Generally speaking, given the added value that will occur after regeneration operations on site, investment in private and public sectors for employment has increased and employment priority is with context residents. The possibility of buying or renting residential property should also be provided with bank loans. Municipalities and other urban institutions can encourage sustainable economic activities by adopting various measures such as tax amnesty for environmentally friendly activities, investment and financial support for activities aligned with sustainability principles, more fundamental legislation, and precise training programs for activity owners as well as officials (Bahraini, 1997). In general attention to the economic aspect of neighborhood economic territories necessities environment urban livable. As mentioned before houses in historical context are largely worn out. Therefore, to increase livability, reduce migration from context due to the insecurity caused by house demolition existing worn-out residences should be divided into two categories of buildings: those with historical value buildings, and those without historical value. Among buildings with historical value, some that are capable of restoration should be restored at the first opportunity. These buildings considering their areas, and artistic value can easily change use types attractive domestic foreign tourism educational institutes etc. In this case, additional economic benefit interaction gatherings created will increase security. Another factor that causes the livability in historical contexts to be of low quality is the lack of proper access to facilities, services, and urban activities. In this regard, cultural and sports uses can be injected into the context during regeneration. Increasing sports and recreational spaces, libraries, and cultural and artistic education centers, in addition to increasing the interaction of context neighborhoods with each other, also improve the quality of life of residents. If the extent of the context is such that it requires a health clinic in its center, this should also be considered in design planning and implementation. Proper access to the public transportation system,

infrastructure improvement of sewage system, and water supply network are also among the executive necessities. If we are faced with traffic congestion in the context due to the unsuitability of the street width, we should increase the width of the street considering the existing regulations and try to solve other traffic problems with proper design. Therefore, designing and building urban environments affects the social process of life and needs to be beneficial for citizens both mentally and physically (Adibi Saadinezhad & Azimi, 2012). To examine the factor of identity and sense of belonging to a place, it is necessary to mention at first that historical contexts are very rich in this regard. Most residents of these contexts have lived in these neighborhoods since birth and their sense of belonging to the context is very high. During regeneration operations, it should be kept in mind that strengthening each of the factors mentioned so far should not pose a threat to the identity of the context. Creating suitable facilities for holding religious and national ceremonies is another appropriate action in this regard. Providing facilities for holding national and religious celebrations, in addition to strengthening a sense of belonging and identity, will also cause residents' vitality. All indicators mentioned for increasing livability in historical context are in service of strengthening a sense of belonging to context. Because the main value of historical context is due to identity and antiquity heritage present in it. Considering the indicators mentioned for increasing urban livability, with proper understanding of historical context, efficient management intervention, use of effective laws and supervision over their correct implementation, it is possible to properly increase livability indicators during regeneration operations, achieving this important goal will increase residents' satisfaction and city vitality. This process should not merely lead to imitation of demolished context body. In this case, unlike "Naghsh-e-Jahan Square" which acts as an active urban center socially, economically, religiously and politically, Atiq Square has not only lost its past life but also due to lack of optimal interaction between users with created space has resulted.

## Intervention Method for Regeneration of Historical Contexts

When the decision is made to recreate a historical context, due to the extensive scope of action on the one hand and the importance of preserving historical heritage on the other hand, it is necessary to observe some principles and rules to achieve the best possible result and reduce tension during work. The management of intervention operations is also very important. It should be noted that in all stages of work execution, preserving the identity of the historical context is a priority (Batey, 2000 as cited in Nourian & Ariana, 2012). Interventions and actions taken in urban affairs require legal validity and authorities' support. Appropriate regulations can support management, planning, and execution elements and provide the context for achieving the objectives of the intended plan. On the other hand, regenerating inefficient urban contexts requires concerted and coordinated efforts from actors with different structures and organizations and different or even contradictory goals. The notable point about these actors is their structural, ownership, management diversity, and their diverse goals and missions. In this field, government organizations with centralized and bureaucratic structures with a sovereignty mission and state duty management, non-governmental organizations with a council structure and a non-profit mission up to private sector companies with centralized management and a profit mission are present. Public sector organizations with a service mission and semi-council structure such as municipalities also significantly influence the realization of the objectives of these plans (Mohebifar, Sobhiyah, Rafeian, Hasas yegane & Elahi, 2017). In our country, Article 123 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, under the title of "Law on the Protection of the Restoration and Revival of Historical-Cultural Contexts", is considered as an urgent plan to support the restoration and revival of historical-cultural contexts and empower the owners and exploiters of historical-cultural buildings. According to this law, in cases where the boundaries of buildings and the scope of historical-cultural contexts are within the scope of the law on support for revival, rehabilitation, and renovation of

worn-out and inefficient urban contexts, appropriations, facilities, and privileges subject to the mentioned law are allocated to the boundaries of buildings and context scopes in proportion to the share of these buildings and contexts from the total area of worn-out contexts, observing the rules for protecting historical-cultural contexts. Accordingly, according to Article 1 of this law, the scope of context is defined as follows: The scope is a registered historical and cultural area, which is specified on the map along with legal rules and regulations for effective protection of national or global cultural, historical, natural works in that area and legal protections as protective layers (landscape, structural, functional). For determining the appropriate use for performing regeneration operations, preserving and promoting identity and values of work by using historical, cultural, natural as well as social-economic capacities and potentials to respond to contemporary needs according to rules and regulations related to the subject is necessary. This law even refers to support for these plans and emphasizes creating a suitable platform for empowering owners and exploiters and improving the quality of life of residents in historical-cultural contexts (Islamic Parliament Research Center Of The Islamic Republic Of IRAN, 2010). Although laws have been passed in this field, there are still some operational deficiencies in some cases. In this regard, one of the managerial mistakes is ignoring the importance of people's presence and residents in the historical context and attracting their material and spiritual participation. If the benefits of ownership after regeneration are properly explained to residents, they will welcome the opportunity that has arisen and as a result. Because they see themselves as a kind of owner of the plan, they will have maximum cooperation in other potential problems. Otherwise, they may have a confrontational approach with implementers considering intervention imposed on context. Sometimes in some experiences of regeneration operations in historical contexts, it is possible that residents are evacuated for starting operations and after completion, they are not returned to their place of residence or business. Undoubtedly, the regeneration of historical context is of interest due to the creation of new economic

opportunities, and unfortunately, often other beneficiaries become the owners of the built spaces. This is while the original residents have gained a sense of belonging to this space by living in it for years and can benefit from the final economic profit as well as the improvement of the quality of their living space by participating in the implementation of the plan. Also, it is better to examine the extent of the area in question at the beginning of the action and divide it into pieces so that there is no need to evacuate all residents at once. On the other hand, with the creation of sufficient facilities, human resources and proper planning, an attempt should be made to shorten the time of implementing the proposed plan; otherwise, regeneration will not only increase livability in the area but will also eliminate the little life that exists in it. Given that after regeneration, the area may attract profiteers, implementers, managers, and lawmakers should be careful about increasing prices and controlling inflation. Also, during executive operations, government or private contractors should always respond to residents in the best way possible and explain the process of operations to them. Private sector investment is permissible on condition of commitment to benefiting from residents' material and spiritual services and benefiting them during implementation and after work completion, but it should prevent potential profiteering.

## Conclusion

To improve livability in the regeneration of historical contexts, the first solution is to develop a conceptual framework for livability standards in historical contexts. In this regard, various criteria including physical and environmental indicators, urban services and infrastructures, and specialized areas should be examined. In addition, a review of the factors affecting the reduction of vitality and life in historical and worn-out contexts has shown that multiple factors such as building and context deterioration, lack of suitable urban facilities and infrastructures with current needs and lack of suitable economic perspective for context, have led to a decrease in vitality and life and ultimately context deterioration.

Since the existing problems in these historical areas have increased the demand of citizens for evacuation, the use of components to increase livability in the regeneration of historical contexts will be very effective in preventing the migration of residents. The components affecting the increase in livability include: improving the economic situation, increasing welfare and recreational facilities, facilitating public transportation system, increasing security, improving design in stress areas. Based on this, it can be concluded that with proper effort and planning, careful management supervision, and implementation at the right time to improve the quality level of each of the mentioned factors in a historical context, it can increase citizens' desire to reside and perform activities in this context. Suggestions were made to improve each of these indicators, the most important of which are residents' participation in economic benefits gained, improving technical infrastructures, increasing cultural art centers, increasing parks and green spaces, and building sports venues. Obviously, by improving the livability index after performing regeneration in a historical context, neighborhood interactions and citizens with each other and residents' satisfaction with life quality in this context will increase. which will increase the sense of belonging and social identity. In addition to that, because historical contexts have valuable architectural heritage elements, after performing operations in context and increasing personal and social security, over time citizens from other areas will visit these areas with peace of mind and a sense of security and will register a pleasant experience in their memory. On the other hand, tourists' interaction with context will cause an economic boom which itself will increase security over time. The use of residents as a human force that has the most knowledge about context compared to other stakeholders and has more concern for creating positive changes should definitely be considered. Based on this foundation it can be admitted that each of the livability components not only will increase the quality of citizens and vitality of context but also will help strengthen each other. In the Fig. 1, the research process is drawn.

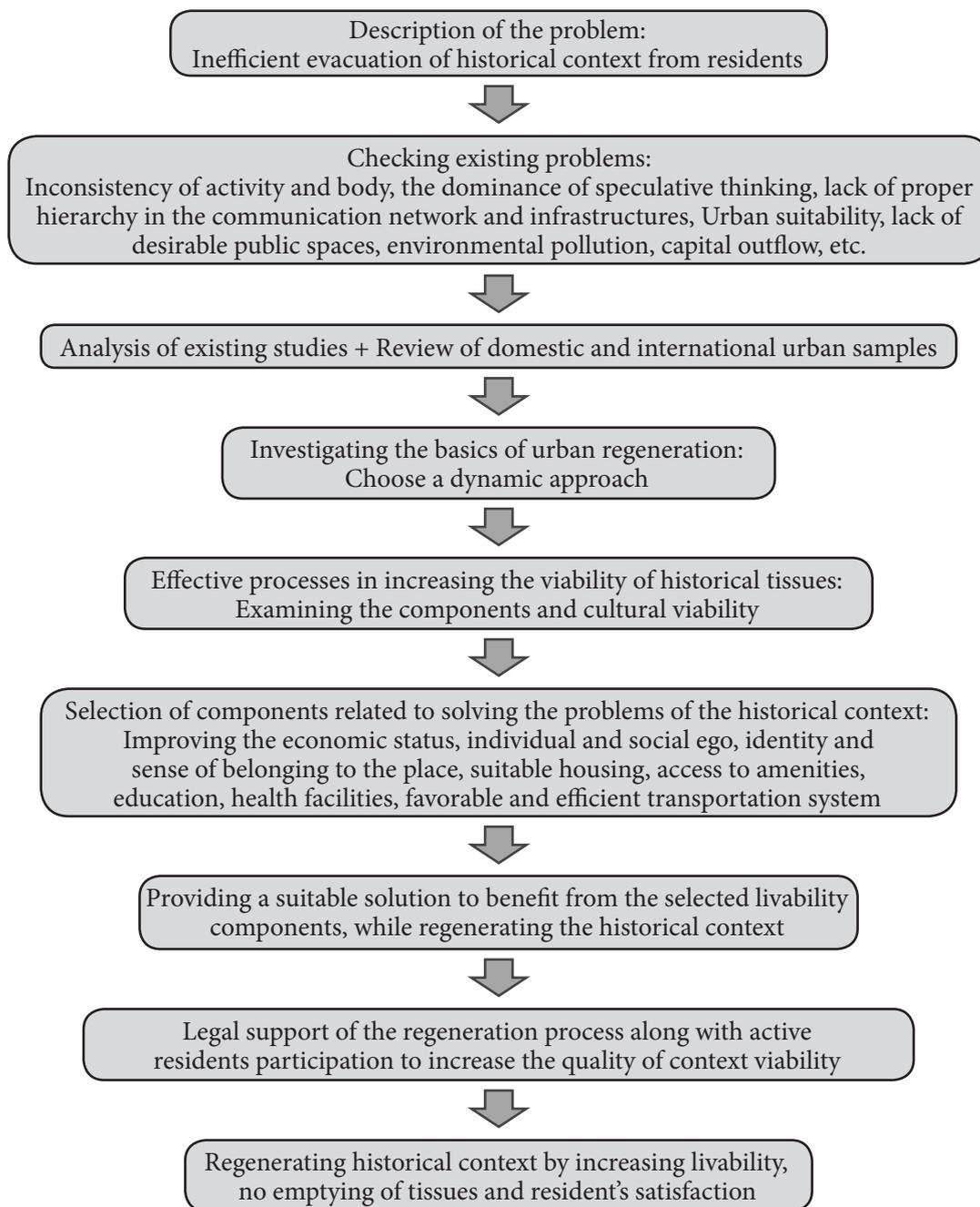


Fig. 1. Research process. source: Authors.

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