



Legal Responses to Cultural Conflict in Globalized Urban Spaces: A Qualitative Exploration

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore how legal actors, urban administrators, and community representatives understand and respond to cultural conflict in globalized urban spaces, with particular attention to rights protection, social order, informal mediation, and institutional recognition. A qualitative research design was employed using semi-structured interviews with 24 participants in Tehran, Iran. Participants included legal professionals, municipal officials, NGO workers, community mediators, academics, and residents with experience of cultural conflict in urban settings. Purposive and theoretical sampling were used to ensure variation in professional role, gender, age, and exposure to intercultural disputes. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached after the twenty-first interview, followed by three confirmatory interviews. Data were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, anonymized, and analyzed through thematic analysis. NVivo software was used to organize coding, compare emerging patterns, develop categories, and retrieve illustrative quotations. Credibility was supported through member checking, peer debriefing, memo writing, and constant comparison across interviews. Five main categories emerged from the analysis: conditional legal recognition of cultural difference, mediation between formal law and informal norms, urban space as a site of cultural friction, the tension between rights-based inclusion and public-order governance, and the need for participatory legal translation. Participants described cultural conflicts as rarely reducible to identity alone; rather, such conflicts were shaped by housing insecurity, gender expectations, migration status, bureaucratic discretion, neighborhood inequality, and unequal access to legal knowledge. Legal responses were perceived as most effective when they combined procedural fairness, culturally informed interpretation, rights protection, and locally trusted mediation mechanisms. The study shows that legal responses to cultural conflict in globalized urban spaces must move beyond either strict legal uniformity or uncritical cultural accommodation. Effective governance requires a plural, rights-based, and participatory legal framework capable of recognizing cultural difference while preventing discrimination, exclusion, and informal coercion.

Keywords: cultural conflict; legal pluralism; urban governance; globalization; multiculturalism; Tehran; qualitative research; semi-structured interviews; legal recognition; social inclusion.

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Introduction

Globalized urban spaces have become major arenas in which cultural diversity, legal authority, social belonging, and public order are continuously negotiated. Cities are not merely physical concentrations of population; they are dense normative

environments where individuals and groups bring different expectations about family life, gender roles, religion, public behavior, language, neighborhood relations, commerce, dispute resolution, and access to public institutions. As global migration, internal mobility, digital communication, and economic restructuring intensify, urban life increasingly exposes legal systems to cultural claims that cannot be fully addressed through conventional models of legal uniformity. The everyday city is therefore a site where formal law encounters unofficial norms, community practices, administrative discretion, and contested moral expectations. This makes cultural conflict not an exceptional problem but a recurring feature of contemporary urban governance.

The importance of cities in global social transformation has been widely recognized. Sassen's theory of the global city emphasizes that globalization is materially grounded in specific urban sites where capital, labor, migration, inequality, and institutional power intersect (Sassen, 1991). Although the classic global-city literature focused primarily on economic restructuring, its implications are also socio-legal. Global cities concentrate heterogeneous populations and expose legal institutions to diverse forms of claim-making, including claims for recognition, anti-discrimination, religious accommodation, migrant inclusion, language access, and protection from cultural marginalization. Urbanization also increases the intensity of encounters among groups whose normative expectations may differ. The United Nations has projected that the majority of the world's population will continue to live in urban areas, with urban governance becoming central to sustainable and inclusive development (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). In this context, law becomes a practical mechanism through which difference is classified, tolerated, restricted, mediated, or transformed.

The concept of cultural conflict requires careful definition. In this study, cultural conflict does not refer simply to disagreement between fixed cultural groups. Rather, it refers to disputes in which actors interpret the source, meaning, or legitimacy of a conflict through cultural, religious, ethnic, linguistic, generational, gendered, or community-based frames. Such conflicts may arise in schools, parks, housing complexes, workplaces, markets, family courts, administrative offices, or municipal spaces. They may involve disputes over dress, public conduct, religious practice, mixed-gender interaction, neighborhood noise, intergenerational authority, minority language use, ceremonial practices, migrant access to services, or competing understandings of family and community responsibility. However, cultural conflict is rarely "purely cultural." As Fraser (1995) argues in relation to recognition and redistribution, struggles over identity are frequently intertwined with material inequality, institutional exclusion, and social power. Therefore, legal responses to cultural conflict must be assessed not only in terms of recognition, but also in terms of fairness, access, participation, and protection from domination.

Legal pluralism provides a useful theoretical lens for understanding these dynamics. Classical legal-centralist perspectives tend to treat state law as the primary or exclusive source of normative authority. However, socio-legal scholarship has shown that multiple normative orders often coexist within the same social field. Griffiths (1986) challenged legal centralism by arguing that law in social life cannot be reduced to state law alone. Merry (1988) similarly described legal pluralism as a condition in which multiple normative systems operate simultaneously, including official law, customary norms, religious expectations, community rules, and institutional practices. In globalized urban spaces, this plurality is not limited to indigenous or rural settings; it is also visible in apartment buildings, municipal offices, migrant communities, neighborhood councils, schools, and family disputes. Legal pluralism therefore helps explain why formal legal responses may fail when they ignore the informal normative worlds through which people interpret rights, obligations, shame, honor, authority, and justice.

Contemporary global legal pluralism extends this insight by emphasizing the interaction of local, national, transnational, and international normative regimes. Berman (2009) argues that pluralism is intensified by the intermingling of multiple communities and legal orders under globalization. Human rights norms, national constitutional principles, municipal regulations, religious norms, community mediation practices, and transnational advocacy discourses may all shape how cultural

conflicts are framed and resolved. De Sousa Santos (2020) similarly emphasizes that law operates across different time-spaces, including local, national, and global dimensions. This is especially relevant in urban settings, where a single dispute may involve municipal regulation, national law, international human rights language, community expectations, and digital public opinion. For example, a conflict over access to public space may be experienced simultaneously as a neighborhood-order issue, a minority-rights issue, a gender-justice issue, and an administrative-law issue.

The literature on multiculturalism and recognition also informs this study. Kymlicka (1995) argued that minority rights can be compatible with liberal democratic principles when they protect cultural membership and equal citizenship rather than entrench domination. Taylor (1994) emphasized that recognition is not a superficial courtesy but a vital human need connected to identity formation and dignity. Young (1990) further argued that justice requires attention to structural domination, cultural imperialism, marginalization, and exclusion from decision-making. These perspectives suggest that legal responses to cultural conflict should not simply impose sameness in the name of neutrality. At the same time, recognition must be critically evaluated. Legal systems should avoid endorsing cultural practices that reproduce coercion, gender inequality, violence, or exclusion within communities. Thus, the central legal challenge is not whether culture should be recognized, but how recognition can be institutionalized without sacrificing individual rights, equality, and procedural justice.

Urban studies adds another important dimension by showing that public space is a key site of intercultural encounter. Amin (2002) argued that the negotiation of ethnic and cultural difference often occurs at very local levels through everyday interaction in shared spaces. Valentine (2008), however, cautioned that encounter alone does not automatically produce tolerance or justice; contact can also reproduce prejudice, anxiety, avoidance, or unequal power relations. Fincher and Iveson (2008) proposed that planning for diversity requires attention to redistribution, recognition, and encounter. These ideas are significant for law because many cultural conflicts emerge not in courts but in ordinary urban sites: parks, schools, streets, public transportation, commercial areas, and housing complexes. Legal responses must therefore be connected to urban planning, municipal governance, administrative practice, and local mechanisms for dialogue.

The concept of super-diversity further complicates conventional legal approaches. Vertovec (2007) used the term super-diversity to describe the diversification of diversity itself, including variation in migration status, language, religion, class, gender, education, legal status, and transnational ties. In globalized cities, cultural conflict cannot be understood through broad ethnic or religious labels alone. Two individuals who belong to the same national, ethnic, or religious group may differ substantially in legal status, social class, gender ideology, educational background, neighborhood position, and relationship to state institutions. This means that legal responses based on simplified assumptions about “community culture” may misrecognize the diversity within groups. In addition, community representatives may not always speak for women, youth, migrants, lower-income residents, or dissenting members. Legal governance must therefore be attentive to internal diversity and power asymmetry.

Tehran provides a significant context for examining these questions. As Iran’s capital and largest metropolitan center, Tehran has long been shaped by internal migration, regional diversity, class stratification, religious and cultural plurality, administrative centralization, and global cultural flows. It contains neighborhoods with different socioeconomic profiles, linguistic backgrounds, migration histories, and patterns of access to public services. Like many large cities in the Global South, Tehran is not only affected by international globalization but also by internal forms of urban multiculturalism, rural-urban mobility, digital media, and uneven development. Urban growth in Iran has been associated with social inequality, housing pressure, marginalization, and governance challenges (Pilehvar, 2021). These conditions make Tehran a valuable site for exploring how legal actors and urban residents understand cultural conflict and what they expect from law.

Despite growing scholarship on multiculturalism, legal pluralism, and urban diversity, there remains a need for qualitative research that examines how legal responses are experienced and interpreted by actors involved in everyday urban conflict. Much existing literature is theoretical, comparative, or policy-oriented. Less attention has been paid to how lawyers, municipal officials, mediators, NGO workers, academics, and residents describe the actual operation of law in culturally diverse urban environments. This study addresses that gap by exploring legal responses to cultural conflict in Tehran through semi-structured interviews. The aim is not to measure the frequency of cultural conflict, but to interpret the meanings, tensions, and institutional patterns through which participants understand legal recognition, mediation, rights protection, public order, and participatory governance.

Accordingly, this study asks: How do legal and urban actors in Tehran understand cultural conflict in globalized urban spaces? What legal and quasi-legal mechanisms are used to respond to such conflict? How do participants evaluate the adequacy, fairness, and limitations of these responses? By answering these questions, the study contributes to socio-legal debates on legal pluralism, urban governance, multicultural citizenship, and the practical conditions under which law can manage difference without reproducing exclusion.

Methods and Materials

This study employed a qualitative exploratory design to investigate legal responses to cultural conflict in globalized urban spaces. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the research aimed to understand participants' meanings, interpretations, experiences, and perceptions rather than test predetermined hypotheses. The study was conducted in Tehran, Iran, where the complexity of urban growth, internal migration, class diversity, administrative centrality, and cultural pluralism provides a suitable context for examining the relationship between law, culture, and urban governance.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling followed by theoretical sampling. The initial sampling strategy sought individuals with direct professional, administrative, academic, or lived experience of cultural conflict in urban settings. As analysis progressed, theoretical sampling was used to include participants who could clarify emerging categories, particularly issues related to informal mediation, municipal discretion, migrant inclusion, and rights-based responses. The final sample consisted of 24 participants: six legal professionals, four municipal or administrative officials, four NGO or civil society workers, three community mediators, three university academics in law or urban studies, and four residents who had direct experience with culturally framed neighborhood or institutional disputes. Participants ranged in age from 26 to 58 years. Thirteen participants were women and eleven were men. Inclusion criteria were being at least 18 years old, residing or working in Tehran for at least three years, and having relevant experience with legal, administrative, or community responses to cultural conflict. Individuals who did not consent to audio-recording or who lacked direct experience with the study topic were excluded.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This method allowed the researcher to explore common topics across participants while also permitting flexibility to follow unexpected meanings and examples raised during the interviews. The interview guide included questions about participants' definitions of cultural conflict, examples of cultural disputes in urban spaces, perceptions of formal legal responses, experiences with mediation or informal resolution, the role of municipal institutions, rights protection, administrative discretion, and recommendations for improving legal governance. Sample questions included: "How do cultural differences become legal or administrative problems in urban life?" "What kinds of institutions usually respond to these conflicts?" "When does formal law help, and when does it make the conflict more difficult?" and "How can law recognize cultural difference without allowing discrimination or coercion?"

Interviews lasted between 45 and 80 minutes and were conducted in Persian in private offices, university settings, community centers, or secure online platforms according to participant preference. All interviews were audio-recorded with

informed consent and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were written after each interview to document contextual observations, emerging analytic insights, and reflexive concerns. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Saturation was identified after the twenty-first interview, when no substantially new codes or conceptual insights emerged. Three additional interviews were conducted to confirm the stability and adequacy of the categories.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. NVivo software was used to organize transcripts, code meaningful segments, compare codes across participant groups, retrieve quotations, and develop thematic maps. The analysis began with repeated reading of transcripts and open coding. Initial codes included “bureaucratic discretion,” “informal mediation,” “fear of complaint,” “minority voice,” “public order,” “neighborhood pressure,” “legal ambiguity,” “gendered conflict,” “migrant insecurity,” and “lack of legal literacy.” These codes were then grouped into broader categories through constant comparison.

To enhance credibility, selected participants were invited to review summaries of the preliminary findings. Peer debriefing was conducted with two researchers familiar with qualitative socio-legal research. Dependability was supported through an audit trail that included interview guides, coding memos, theme-development notes, and analytic decisions. Confirmability was addressed through reflexive memo writing, particularly regarding the researcher’s assumptions about law, culture, and rights. Transferability was supported by providing thick description of the study context, participants, and categories. Ethical principles included voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymization of transcripts, and the right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

Findings

The participants included 24 individuals from Tehran. In terms of gender, 13 participants were women and 11 were men. The age distribution was as follows: five participants were 26–35 years old, nine were 36–45 years old, seven were 46–55 years old, and three were older than 55 years. Regarding professional or social role, six participants were legal professionals, four were municipal or administrative officials, four were NGO or civil society workers, three were community mediators, three were university academics, and four were residents with direct experience of culturally framed urban disputes. In terms of educational level, five participants held a bachelor’s degree, eleven held a master’s degree, and eight held a doctoral or professional legal degree. Participants’ experience with cultural conflict ranged from direct involvement in neighborhood disputes to professional engagement with legal complaints, municipal mediation, minority-rights advocacy, family-related conflicts, and administrative decision-making.

The first main category was **conditional legal recognition of cultural difference**. Participants repeatedly emphasized that formal institutions did not completely ignore cultural diversity, but recognition was often conditional, inconsistent, and dependent on the discretion of legal or administrative actors. Cultural difference was usually acknowledged only when it could be translated into familiar legal categories such as public order, family dispute, property conflict, administrative complaint, or social harm. Several participants noted that when cultural claims were expressed in rights-based language, they were more likely to receive institutional attention; however, when they were expressed as community traditions, religious expectations, or minority customs, they were often treated as private matters or potential threats to order. A legal professional explained, “The law hears culture only when it becomes a case. Before that, people manage it themselves, sometimes fairly and sometimes with pressure. But when it enters the office or the court, culture must wear legal clothes.” This category shows that recognition was not absent, but it was filtered through legal categories that sometimes narrowed the lived complexity of conflict.

The second category was **mediation between formal law and informal norms**. Participants described many cultural conflicts as being resolved outside formal court processes through family negotiation, local mediation, neighborhood councils,

trusted elders, NGO workers, building managers, or municipal officers. These mechanisms were valued because they were faster, less costly, and more sensitive to local meanings. However, participants also warned that informal mediation could reproduce unequal power relations, especially in conflicts involving women, migrants, youth, or lower-income residents. One NGO worker stated, “Mediation is useful when both sides can speak. But sometimes mediation means the weaker person is told to be patient for the sake of culture.” A community mediator similarly observed, “If we know the law and the culture together, we can calm the conflict. If we know only culture, we may silence someone. If we know only law, people may not accept the result.” This category indicates that effective legal response requires structured interaction between formal law and informal norms, rather than total reliance on either.

The third category was **urban space as a site of cultural friction**. Participants frequently located cultural conflict in specific urban spaces, including apartment buildings, parks, public transportation, schools, markets, municipal offices, and mixed-income neighborhoods. Conflicts were often triggered by the shared use of space: noise, ceremonies, dress, gender interaction, children’s behavior, religious expression, language, commercial practices, or expectations about privacy. Participants emphasized that such conflicts were intensified by crowding, economic pressure, weak neighborhood communication, and lack of participatory planning. A resident described an apartment dispute by saying, “The problem was not only the ceremony or the noise. The problem was that every family thought the building should follow its own way of living.” A municipal participant added, “Many complaints come to us as cultural complaints, but behind them there is lack of space, lack of dialogue, and sometimes class prejudice.” This finding suggests that cultural conflict is spatially produced and cannot be addressed only through abstract legal norms.

The fourth category was **tension between rights-based inclusion and public-order governance**. Participants described a persistent tension between protecting cultural rights and maintaining social order. Legal and administrative actors often justified intervention through the language of order, security, morality, or neighborhood peace. While participants accepted the need for public order, they criticized responses that treated cultural difference primarily as a risk. Minority practices, migrant presence, youth lifestyles, or gender-related claims were sometimes viewed through suspicion rather than rights. An academic participant noted, “Public order is necessary, but it becomes problematic when it is used as a shortcut. Instead of asking whose rights are affected and how to balance them, institutions sometimes ask only how to stop the complaint.” A legal professional similarly stated, “The easiest answer is prohibition, but prohibition does not teach coexistence. It only moves the conflict somewhere else.” This category demonstrates that public-order governance can resolve visible conflict while leaving underlying exclusion unaddressed.

The fifth category was **participatory legal translation and institutional learning**. Participants argued that the most effective responses occurred when institutions translated legal rights into accessible language and translated cultural expectations into legally acceptable forms. This did not mean accepting every cultural claim. Rather, it meant creating procedures through which affected groups could explain their concerns, hear legal limits, and participate in designing fair solutions. Participants suggested legal literacy programs, municipal dialogue forums, trained cultural mediators, clearer complaint procedures, multilingual information where needed, and cooperation between legal institutions and civil society organizations. One municipal official stated, “People do not always need a court. Sometimes they need someone to explain what the law protects, what it does not allow, and how both sides can live in the same space.” Another participant emphasized, “When people participate in the rule, they obey it more. When they only receive the rule, they look for ways around it.” This category highlights the importance of procedural participation, legal communication, and institutional reflexivity.

Discussion

This study explored how legal and urban actors in Tehran understand and respond to cultural conflict in globalized urban spaces. The findings show that cultural conflict is not simply a clash between separate cultural groups; rather, it is a complex socio-legal process shaped by legal categories, urban space, informal authority, inequality, administrative discretion, and rights consciousness. Participants described law as both necessary and insufficient. It is necessary because cultural claims can involve rights, discrimination, coercion, gender inequality, access to services, and public order. It is insufficient when it treats culture only as a private matter, a security problem, or a disturbance to administrative order. This result aligns with legal pluralism scholarship, which argues that social life is governed by multiple normative orders, including state law, community norms, religious expectations, institutional practices, and informal dispute-resolution systems (Griffiths, 1986; Merry, 1988; Tamanaha, 2008). In Tehran's urban context, legal pluralism appeared not as an abstract theory but as an everyday condition of governance.

The first finding, conditional legal recognition, indicates that cultural difference becomes institutionally visible only when it is translated into recognized legal or administrative categories. This supports Taylor's (1994) argument that recognition is central to dignity, but it also confirms Fraser's (1995) warning that recognition must be connected to institutional justice rather than symbolic acknowledgment alone. Participants did not demand unlimited cultural accommodation. Instead, they emphasized predictable, fair, and rights-sensitive recognition. This is consistent with Kymlicka's (1995) view that minority recognition can be compatible with liberal legal principles when it strengthens equal citizenship rather than creating insulated zones of domination. However, the findings also show that legal systems often recognize culture unevenly. Those with stronger legal literacy, social status, or institutional access are better able to frame their claims in acceptable legal language. Thus, recognition is mediated by power.

The second finding, mediation between formal law and informal norms, reflects a central insight of socio-legal studies: people often experience justice through hybrid mechanisms rather than formal courts alone. Informal mediation may reduce escalation and preserve social relationships, but it can also pressure vulnerable parties to accept unfair outcomes. This finding aligns with Merry's (2006) work on legal translation and vernacularization, which shows that rights language is transformed as it moves through local contexts. It also corresponds with Berman's (2009) account of global legal pluralism, where multiple normative communities interact and overlap rather than operate in isolation. In the present study, participants valued mediation when it was connected to rights and procedural fairness. They criticized it when it became a mechanism for silencing women, migrants, youth, or socially weaker residents. Therefore, the study suggests that mediation should be legally informed, accountable, and sensitive to unequal bargaining power.

The third finding, urban space as a site of cultural friction, demonstrates that cultural conflict is spatially embedded. Participants connected disputes to apartment living, public parks, schools, transportation, markets, and municipal offices. This supports Amin's (2002) argument that the negotiation of difference often occurs at the local level through everyday urban encounters. However, the findings also support Valentine's (2008) critique that encounter alone does not guarantee tolerance. Shared space may generate dialogue, but it may also produce discomfort, prejudice, surveillance, and exclusion. In Tehran, participants described conflicts that appeared cultural on the surface but were intensified by crowding, class inequality, weak neighborhood institutions, and limited participatory planning. This also aligns with Fincher and Iveson's (2008) argument that planning for diversity requires redistribution, recognition, and encounter. Law cannot manage cultural conflict effectively if urban governance ignores material conditions that make coexistence difficult.

The fourth finding concerns the tension between rights-based inclusion and public-order governance. Participants recognized that urban authorities must maintain order, but they criticized legal responses that reduce cultural difference to risk. This reflects a broader dilemma in multicultural governance: legal institutions must balance individual rights, collective claims,

public space, and social peace. Young's (1990) theory of justice is useful here because it shifts attention from distribution alone to domination, marginalization, cultural imperialism, and exclusion from decision-making. When public order is defined without participation from affected groups, it may reproduce majority norms under the appearance of neutrality. Similarly, de Sousa Santos (2020) argues that law operates across unequal social spaces and can either reproduce or challenge domination. The participants' concern was not that public order should be abandoned, but that it should be interpreted through proportionality, equality, and participation rather than administrative convenience.

The fifth finding, participatory legal translation and institutional learning, is perhaps the most constructive contribution of the study. Participants suggested that legal responses are most effective when they translate rights into accessible language and translate cultural claims into fair, lawful, and negotiable terms. This finding aligns with intercultural governance literature, which emphasizes dialogue, interaction, and institutional adaptation rather than passive coexistence or assimilation (Zapata-Barrero, 2017). It also connects with Vertovec's (2007) concept of super-diversity, because legal institutions cannot rely on simplified assumptions about homogeneous communities. Participatory legal translation helps institutions understand internal differences within groups and prevents dominant community voices from monopolizing representation. In practical terms, this requires trained mediators, legal literacy, transparent complaint procedures, civil society participation, and municipal forums that allow residents to discuss conflict before it becomes a formal legal dispute.

Overall, the study contributes to legal pluralism and urban governance scholarship by showing that cultural conflict in globalized urban spaces is best understood as a dynamic interaction among law, culture, space, and inequality. The findings challenge two inadequate approaches. The first is rigid legal uniformity, which assumes that equal treatment means ignoring cultural difference. The second is uncritical cultural accommodation, which assumes that cultural claims should be accepted without examining internal power relations. Participants instead pointed toward a rights-based pluralism: one that recognizes cultural meanings, protects individual dignity, prevents coercion, and creates participatory procedures for negotiated coexistence. This approach is particularly relevant in cities like Tehran, where cultural diversity is shaped by both internal migration and global cultural flows.

Limitations: This study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to 24 participants in Tehran and therefore cannot represent all urban experiences in Iran or other globalized cities. Second, because the study relied on semi-structured interviews, the findings reflect participants' perceptions and interpretations rather than direct observation of legal proceedings or mediation sessions. Third, some participants may have moderated their responses because cultural conflict, legal authority, minority recognition, and public order are sensitive topics. Fourth, the study included diverse participant groups, but the number of participants within each subgroup was small. Future research should therefore interpret the findings as contextually grounded qualitative insights rather than statistically generalizable conclusions.

Suggestions for future research: Future studies should compare legal responses to cultural conflict across different Iranian cities and across neighborhoods with different socioeconomic, ethnic, and migration profiles. Comparative research between Tehran and other globalized urban centers could also clarify which patterns are context-specific and which reflect broader dynamics of urban legal pluralism. Ethnographic studies of municipal offices, mediation sessions, housing disputes, and public-space conflicts would provide richer evidence of how legal and informal norms operate in practice. Future research should also focus more specifically on the experiences of women, migrants, youth, religious minorities, and lower-income residents, whose voices may be underrepresented in official accounts of cultural conflict.

Suggestions for practice: Legal and municipal institutions should develop clearer, rights-based procedures for responding to culturally framed disputes. Training programs for judges, lawyers, municipal officers, mediators, and social workers should address cultural diversity, legal pluralism, anti-discrimination principles, gender sensitivity, and participatory conflict

resolution. Municipalities should create local dialogue forums where residents can discuss shared-space conflicts before they escalate into formal complaints. Civil society organizations can help translate legal rights into accessible language and support vulnerable residents during mediation. Finally, legal responses should avoid both automatic prohibition and uncritical accommodation; instead, they should promote fair coexistence through proportionality, transparency, participation, and protection of individual rights.

Conclusion

This qualitative study examined legal responses to cultural conflict in globalized urban spaces through semi-structured interviews with 24 participants in Tehran. The findings revealed that cultural conflict is produced through the interaction of formal law, informal norms, urban space, institutional discretion, and social inequality. Five main categories were identified: conditional legal recognition of cultural difference, mediation between formal law and informal norms, urban space as a site of cultural friction, tension between rights-based inclusion and public-order governance, and participatory legal translation and institutional learning.

The study shows that law plays an essential role in managing cultural diversity, but its effectiveness depends on how it recognizes difference, protects vulnerable individuals, and creates participatory procedures for resolving disputes. A purely uniform legal approach may overlook cultural meanings and deepen mistrust. Conversely, an uncritical accommodationist approach may legitimize coercion or inequality within communities. The most promising response is a rights-based plural legal framework that combines formal legal protection with culturally informed mediation, urban participation, and accessible legal communication.

In globalized urban spaces, cultural conflict should not be treated only as a threat to order. It should also be understood as an opportunity for institutions to learn, adapt, and strengthen inclusive citizenship. Tehran's experience suggests that legal governance of diversity requires not only rules, but also translation, dialogue, accountability, and sensitivity to the lived realities of urban residents.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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