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TAYYIB-BASED ETHICAL EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR URBAN PLANNING GOVERNANCE IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Urban planning governance shapes whether cities develop in ways that are sustainable, inclusive, and socially responsible. In Malaysia, development proposals are typically assessed through statutory planning controls such as zoning, density, and land-use requirements. Although these mechanisms provide legal certainty and procedural consistency, they do not on their own ensure ethically adequate development outcomes. This study therefore conceptualises the Islamic ethical concept of *tayyib* as a post-compliance evaluative framework for urban planning governance. Using a qualitative conceptual design, the study draws on document analysis and thematic synthesis of three bodies of material: scholarship on urban planning governance and sustainable cities; Malaysian planning legislation and policy, including the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172) and the Second National Urbanisation Policy (NUP2); and Islamic ethical scholarship on *tayyib*. The analysis develops a multi-layered framework comprising regulatory compliance, sustainability performance, and ethical sufficiency. It also proposes operational indicators for environmental integrity, spatial justice, housing equity, community well-being, and governance accountability. Within this framework, *tayyib* functions primarily as an ex ante ethical filter during development control, with additional ex post use in post-approval monitoring and ethical audit. The framework offers a value-based complement to existing regulatory and sustainability assessments and supports a more holistic evaluation of urban development outcomes.

Keywords: urban governance; *tayyib*; ethical evaluation; sustainable urban planning; Malaysia

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INTRODUCTION

Governance in urban planning plays a central role in urban development, management, and sustainability. In Malaysia, local authorities are the principal administrative bodies responsible for regulating urban planning, monitoring development, and implementing urban policies within their respective jurisdictions (Yusup et al., 2016). Urban planning decisions are governed primarily by statutory mechanisms under the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172), which sets out the planning control and approval framework. In terms of policy, national policies such as the Second National Urbanisation Policy (NUP2) focus on sustainability, liveability, and spatially balanced urban developments (PlanMalaysia, 2016).

These governance arrangements operate within a wider national development strategy aimed at improving urban competitiveness while promoting sustainable urbanisation. Governance of urban areas has been identified as central to enhancing the efficiency, transparency, and sustainability of the planning system (Jusoh & Rashid, 2009). However, rapid urbanisation and marketisation also create governance challenges related to socio-spatial inequality and environmental sustainability. The expansion of metropolitan areas has increased pressure on green spaces and natural ecosystems, as reflected in the loss of urban forests and fragmentation of landscapes in Greater Kuala Lumpur (Hosen & Shukri, 2024; Yusof & Rakhshandehroo, 2016).

Although statutory planning provides an important regulatory framework, compliance with legal standards alone does not necessarily ensure socially and environmentally responsible development outcomes. Planning approval procedures primarily assess whether development proposals meet technical planning standards such as zoning regulations, density requirements, and land-use classifications. However, development initiatives may comply with these requirements while still producing socially inequitable or environmentally harmful outcomes (Zahir & Khamidi, 2025). This limitation highlights the need to move beyond regulatory compliance towards a more substantive evaluation of development outcomes.

While sustainable urban governance has received increasing attention in planning scholarship, relatively few studies have developed explicit frameworks capable of extending planning evaluation beyond technical compliance and performance-based sustainability indicators (Kanasan & Hassan, 2023; Rahman et al., 2025). Although sustainability-oriented evaluation frameworks exist, they rarely provide explicit criteria for assessing distributive justice, ethical legitimacy, or normative sufficiency in planning decisions. As a result, planning evaluation continues to rely largely on technical indicators without clearly addressing ethical sufficiency or the stage at which such

evaluation should be systematically incorporated into decision-making processes (Kurzi et al., 2024; Roslan et al., 2025; Somasundram et al., 2018).

This study therefore aims to develop an ethical evaluation framework for urban planning governance based on the concept of *tayyib*. To address this gap, the study conceptualises *tayyib* as a post-compliance ethical evaluation tool operating primarily *ex ante* during development control and secondarily *ex post* through post-approval monitoring. By integrating Islamic ethical principles with contemporary sustainability discourse, the study develops an analytical perspective for evaluating whether urban development outcomes contribute to holistic human well-being, environmental sustainability, and socially responsible urban development. The article makes two interrelated conceptual contributions to planning governance theory: first, by conceptualising *tayyib* as an explicit post-compliance evaluation framework, and second, by proposing a multi-layered model of planning evaluation in which regulatory compliance, sustainability performance, and ethical sufficiency operate as complementary dimensions of assessment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Urban Planning Governance and Sustainable Cities

Urban governance refers to the institutional arrangements that guide the planning, regulation, and management of urban development. In contemporary planning theory, urban governance is closely associated with sustainable urban development, which emphasises environmental sustainability, participatory decision-making, and equitable distribution of urban resources (Titov, 2021). In this context, governance involves coordination among multiple stakeholders including planning authorities, government agencies, private sector actors, and civil society organisations (Bajracharya & Khan, 2020).

Effective urban governance is fundamental to achieving sustainable and inclusive urban environments. In reality however, planning systems act as a balancing mechanism for three main areas; namely the promotion of economic development, environmental constraint and sustainability goals (Teriman et al., 2009).

Although participation mechanisms are formally included within the planning process with the intention of enhancing democratic response (Saporito, 2016), empirical evidence indicates that the assessment of planning continues to be based upon mainly technical compliance indicators. Regulatory frameworks and performance indicators remain primarily focused upon the attainment of compliance with spatial planning regulations and infrastructure provision rather than the pursuit of normative considerations relating to social justice, environmental responsibility and community well-being (Tomer & Kaushik, 2026).

In Malaysia, the importance of environmental governance and sustainable development has grown significantly for planners with respect to developing policies on sustainability and green infrastructure resiliency. However, there continue to be barriers to implementing these concepts, namely because of the fragmentation of institutions and the decentralised nature of government (Nizarudin & Zakariya, 2025). Public participation is also an important component of decision-making processes under the Town and Country Planning Act of 1976, but this type of participation typically occurs procedurally rather than substantively (Zanudin et al., 2021).

The above findings demonstrate how the limitations of planning governance frameworks create structural limitations in evaluating the substantive merit or fairness of final development outcomes. This indicates a long-standing deficiency within the area of evaluating plans, specifically an absence of systematic method to determine the ethical adequacy of plans relative to non-technical and non-sustainability-based measures.

Ethical Dimensions of Urban Development

Urban development decisions have ethical implications as they affect the provision of housing, accessibility to infrastructure services, public facilities, and environmental quality. This implies that such decisions always have a direct impact on social justice, social welfare, and environmental sustainability. There has been a growing focus in the field of planning theory that the impact of development decisions must be evaluated not only in terms of efficiency and economic performance but also in relation to social welfare and sustainability in development (Barrett et al., 2016).

Environmental sustainability can be identified as a major ethical issue in the field of planning. Rapid urbanisation processes often generate conflicts between economic development, environmental sustainability, and social justice. Sustainable planning strategies such as compact development, mixed land use strategies, and the development of green spaces have been advocated to resolve the conflicts between development and environmental sustainability (Akther & Islam, 2020; Kosoe & Ogwu, 2025). Urban development also reflects diverse and sometimes competing social values. Cities function as complex governance systems in which economic, social, and environmental interests must be balanced through planning processes. Ethical planning governance therefore requires decision-making processes capable of accommodating competing interests while promoting socially beneficial urban development outcomes (McAuliffe & Rogers, 2019).

Accordingly, the central ethical issue in urban planning is not merely whether development complies with regulatory and performance-based criteria, but whether the resulting distribution of costs and benefits can be justified as fair,

responsible, and socially beneficial. This reinforces the need for an evaluative framework that explicitly addresses ethical sufficiency within planning decision-making.

The Concept of *Tayyib* in Urban Development

In this study, the concept of *tayyib* is an evaluative principle that could guide urban planning governance through the promotion of socially beneficial and environmentally sustainable development outcomes. In Islamic ethics, the concept of *tayyib* refers to goodness and wholesomeness, and it encompasses the idea of ethics and morality, which go beyond the idea of permissibility and legality and into the realm of positive consequences and beneficial impacts on individuals, societies, and the environment (Idris et al., 2022; Islam & Islam, 2025; Nordin et al., 2026). The Islamic concepts of halal and *tayyib*, as derived from the Qur'an, implies the idea of legality and permissibility and the promotion of the well-being and welfare of individuals and societies, and the positive consequences of actions and deeds on the individual and the community. Therefore, the concept of *tayyib* could introduce the idea of the evaluative principle, which promotes justice and well-being and the positive consequences of all human activities and deeds (ISRA, 2024; Nordin et al., 2024; Yasmeen et al., 2024).

Applied to urban planning governance, *tayyib* provides a conceptual basis for evaluating development outcomes in terms of their ethical sufficiency rather than regulatory admissibility alone. Thus, this changes the focus for assessing how well development improves societal wellbeing, environmental sustainability and good governance. *Tayyib* is positioned as an evaluative framework with specific ethical standards that are used to evaluate development against existing regulatory frameworks. It does so by providing an additional layer of evaluation based on ethics, which addresses the noted difference between meeting the requirements of current planning regulations and meeting the ethical requirements of developments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Materials

This study employed a qualitative conceptual research design with the aim of developing a normative framework for assessing the ethical aspects of urban planning governance. Conceptual research aims to clarify concepts and synthesise theoretical approaches in order to develop an analytical framework rather than test a hypothesis or theory (Jabareen, 2009; Snyder, 2019). The study is based on document analysis and conceptual synthesis. The documents were grouped into three types. First, the literature on urban planning governance, sustainable cities, and evaluation frameworks for planning. Second, the

documents on the Malaysian planning legislation and policy instruments that guide the planning governance system and urban development priorities. These policy documents include the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172) and the national policy documents on planning that guide the planning system with the aim of promoting sustainability-oriented goals and spatial development priorities within the Malaysian planning system. These documents include the Second National Urbanisation Policy (NUP2) 2016-2025. The third category consists of Islamic ethical literature on the concept of *tayyib* as a normative principle for evaluating social welfare and ethical outcomes.

Document analysis is a commonly employed qualitative method for examining policy documents and scholarly literature in order to identify the conceptual patterns and governance logics embedded in them (Bowen, 2011). The selected documents were analysed in terms of three domains of analysis: governance evaluation in planning systems, sustainability evaluation in urban development, and normative ethical principles in planning evaluation.

Analytic Procedure

Following the document review, thematic interpretation was used to identify recurring patterns of evaluative concepts related to regulatory legality, sustainability performance, and ethical governance. Thematic analysis is a scientific approach to thematic identification in qualitative data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Three steps were involved in the thematic analysis process.

The literature and policy documents identified some important evaluative concepts such as regulatory legality, environmental performance, distribution of planning benefits, and governance accountability. These concepts were subsequently grouped into more general evaluative themes such as environmental integrity, spatial justice, community well-being, and governance transparency. The interrelationship between these evaluative themes was then synthesised into a multi-layered evaluation model that includes regulatory compliance, sustainability performance, and ethical sufficiency.

In this manner, ethical concepts related to *tayyib* were transformed into analytical indicators pertinent to urban planning governance. These analytical indicators became the basis for the evaluative framework presented in the research. The research presented a conceptual study, and the proposed framework has not been subject to empirical testing. Future research on the applicability of the proposed framework can be examined.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Compliance-Based Planning Governance and Ethical Implications

Malaysia's planning governance system primarily operates through a regulatory compliance model, whereby the planning proposal is assessed against the

planning regulations and procedures. This model offers the advantages of legal security and procedural predictability through conformity with planning regulations (Roosli & O'Keefe, 2011). However, the planning regulations and procedures mainly focus on the assessment of the compliance of the planning proposal with the technical planning standards and not the ethical standards. Consequently, compliance with regulatory requirements does not automatically ensure ethically responsible development outcomes. Research on governance regulation and environmental assessment shows that conformity-oriented systems may approve projects that satisfy legal standards while still generating environmental or social harm due to insufficient evaluation of wider impacts (Bedi, 2013; Naime, 2017). These limitations have prompted increasing calls for governance approaches that incorporate ethical considerations into development evaluation processes (Barrett et al., 2016).

Accordingly, urban planning governance increasingly requires evaluative approaches that extend beyond procedural compliance to incorporate broader societal and environmental considerations. Integrating ethical considerations into planning evaluation allows development outcomes to be assessed not only in terms of regulatory conformity but also in relation to their wider consequences for communities and ecosystems (Santoian et al., 2023).

Tayyib as an Ex Ante Post-Compliance Tool with Ex Post Audit Potential

Building on these limitations, this study conceptualises *tayyib* as a post-compliance ethical evaluation tool applied primarily ex ante, after legal and technical conformity has been established but before final planning approval. In this sense, post-compliance evaluation refers to a further stage of assessment in which development proposals are examined in terms of their broader ethical, social, and environmental consequences rather than regulatory admissibility alone. The framework may also be used ex post as a post-approval monitoring and audit reference where local authorities seek to evaluate whether implementation continues to meet ethical expectations. Within planning governance, *tayyib* therefore functions as a normative filter: while legal compliance establishes admissibility, *tayyib* asks whether development outcomes are socially desirable, environmentally responsible, and ethically justifiable. In Islamic ethical studies, *tayyib* denotes goodness and wholesomeness that extend beyond mere legal permissibility (Islam & Islam, 2025; Mohd Sirajuddin & Mahaiyadin, 2022). Applied to urban planning, it provides a normative perspective for evaluating development outcomes in relation to sustainability, social welfare, and environmental responsibility (Idris et al., 2022; Yasmeen et al., 2024).

Under this framework, development outcomes may be evaluated not only from the point of view of their regulatory validity but also in relation to their

contribution to human well-being, environmental sustainability, and socially responsible urban development. While the sustainability approach to evaluation primarily deals with environmental and socio-economic performance, the introduction of the concept of *tayyib* adds a moral dimension to the evaluation of the development outcomes. From this perspective, planning evaluation can be understood as consisting of three interconnected dimensions: regulatory validity, sustainability performance, and ethical sufficiency. While the concept of regulatory validity focuses on ensuring that development outcomes are valid from the perspective of the regulations in place, the concept of sustainability performance addresses the environmental performance of these development outcomes. On the other hand, the concept of ethical sufficiency deals with the moral performance of the development outcomes in relation to their contribution to the well-being of society.

Within this framework, ethical sufficiency is a distinct evaluation layer which addresses the limitations of compliance, regulatory and sustainability-based evaluations by adding an explicit set of normative criteria for assessing the justice of development outcomes, the welfare of society and responsibility to the environment. This layered evaluation approach allows the assessment of development proposals within the context of planning governance to evaluate the legal validity, sustainability performance, and ethical implications of those proposals on the broader community and urban environment. Overall, the framework proposes a staged evaluation process for assessing development proposals, where the first step is to ensure compliance with regulations, second to assess sustainability performance, and lastly to assess ethical sufficiency through the *tayyib* viewpoint. This layered structure provides a clear relationship between legality, sustainability and ethical responsibility in terms of planning governance. Figure 1 presents the conceptual understanding of the interconnectedness between the different dimensions of evaluation.

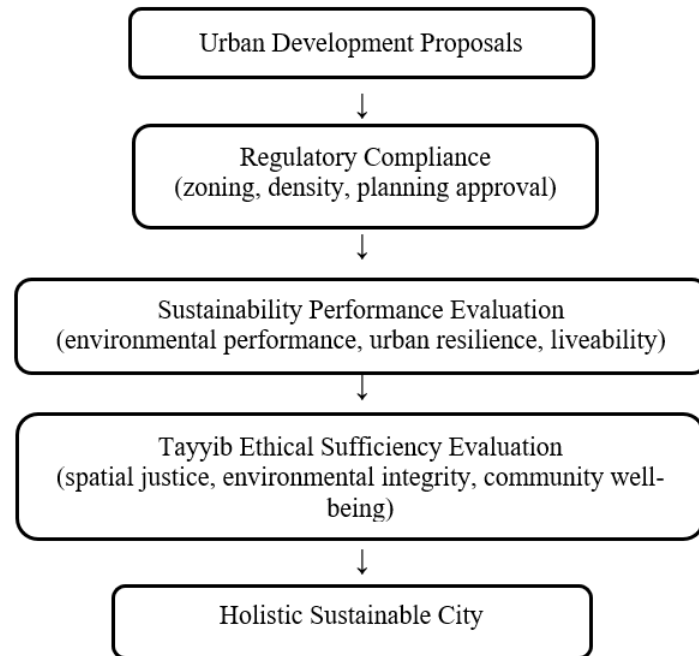


Figure 1: *Tayyib*-Based Ethical Urban Planning Governance Framework

Source: Author's conceptualisation based on the ethical concept of tayyib and urban planning governance literature

Figure 1 presents a stratified evaluative structure for planning governance. In the proposed structure, regulatory compliance is the first level in the evaluation process for development approvals, sustainability evaluation is the second level that examines environmental and functional sustainability, while the *tayyib*-based level is a post-compliance level that examines distributive justice, environmental integrity, and governance accountability.

To operationalise the proposed structure, the study proposes a set of planning governance indicators that can be used as an evaluative tool to link ethical principles with planning practice. This set of indicators can be used as an additional level of evaluation by planning authorities for development applications that are already evaluated as compliant with regulatory and sustainability requirements.

Table 1: *Tayyib*-Based Urban Planning Governance Indicators

<i>Tayyib</i> Dimension	Planning Governance Indicator	Illustrative Threshold	Minimum	Assessment Note
Environmental integrity	Protection of ecological systems	No development in environmentally sensitive or protected areas; no significant unmitigated ecological harm to drainage, green corridors, or tree cover		Fail if material ecological harm remains unmitigated
Spatial justice	Equitable access to transport and services	Safe pedestrian access to public transport and basic daily services for the majority of residents		Fail if access benefits are spatially exclusionary or unevenly concentrated
Housing equity	Provision of affordable and inclusive housing	Affordable housing provision meets the applicable local or state requirement; lower-cost units are spatially integrated rather than segregated		Fail if affordability requirement is not met
Community well-being	Access to public spaces and facilities	Accessible public open space and basic community facilities are provided, and major noise, traffic, or safety harms are mitigated		Fail if public benefit is outweighed by clear unmitigated harm
Governance accountability	Transparency and public participation	At least two documented engagement stages and a written response matrix to material objections		Fail if engagement is merely procedural or undocumented

Source: Author's synthesis based on the ethical concept of tayyib and urban planning governance literature.

The thresholds in Table 1 are intended as illustrative minimums for ethical sufficiency and should be calibrated by local authority requirements, state planning policies, and site-specific conditions. Ethical sufficiency follows a non-compensatory rule: a proposal must meet the minimum threshold in every *tayyib* dimension, and failure in any one dimension means that it cannot yet be classified as ethically sufficient. Taken together, these thresholds and indicators provide a structured basis for assessing ethical sufficiency alongside regulatory and sustainability-based planning assessments, consistent with calls for normative evaluation in urban governance (Chapman et al., 2024; Saraswat et al., 2025).

The framework is analytically distinct from Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) criteria, sustainable appraisals and social impact assessments

by way of scope, application and decision-making methodology. In terms of focus, ESG is organization-focused and focused on disclosures, whilst the *tayyib* framework is decision-focused and utilized as an appraisal tool at the stage of development control. Sustainable appraisal evaluates options according to predetermined outcomes, whilst the *tayyib* framework uses a non-compensatory ethical sufficiency test that utilizes principles of justice, wholesome governance and accountability.

Social impact assessment identifies potential negative impacts of projects and develops measures to mitigate them. The *tayyib* framework combines social, environmental and governance factors into one evaluative lens and can serve as a complementary ethical layer versus the other frameworks as substitutes. Table 1 illustrates indicators synthesized from planning governance literature, sustainability evaluation models and Islamic ethics related to *tayyib*. Indicators illustrated in Table 1 represent a variety of normative concerns in urban planning such as environmental protection, equitable access, inclusive housing, community well-being and transparency in governance. The *tayyib* framework transforms ethical principles into operative criteria that enable ethical sufficiency to be systematically evaluated through development decision-making.

Under this framework, all minimum thresholds must be met across all *tayyib* dimensions. Therefore, no minimum threshold-based classifications are possible due to partial compliance. The project could meet zoning requirements and meet sustainability standards, but still not be considered ethically sufficient if it does not provide equitable housing or allow for meaningful community participation.

Illustrative Application in Development Evaluation

To demonstrate the operational application of the framework within a Malaysian planning context, consider that a local government council assesses a proposal for a mixed-use redevelopment project located on brownfield land adjacent to a railway station in the Greater Kuala Lumpur area. The proposed redevelopment meets all the relevant criteria regarding zoning and density as outlined by the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172). Additionally, the proposal complies with some of the sustainable development objectives set out in the Second National Urbanisation Policy (NUP2) particularly those related to transit-oriented development and compact cities.

Next, a *tayyib* assessment is carried out ex ante at the development control phase before final approval. In terms of environmental integrity, the proposal does not impact ecologically sensitive sites; it includes adequate drainage mitigation measures. With respect to spatial justice, residents have proximity to public transportation and other essential services through walking distance, which corresponds to NUP2's focus on accessibility and liveability. In

contrast, however, the proposal does not meet housing equity as the percentage of affordable housing included is less than required by local planning authorities. Furthermore, governance accountability is lacking because only one public meeting was held during the consultation process and there is no documented response outlining to stakeholder objections, even though Act 172 contains specific provisions for public participation.

Consequently, using this model, the redevelopment proposal would need to be revised or approved conditionally until the affordable housing requirements were satisfied; adequate publicly accessible open spaces had been provided; and community engagement activities had been documented. This example illustrates how *tayyib* framework operates as an ethical filter after compliance in statutory planning decision making processes both ex ante to assist with determining approvals and ex post as a benchmark for evaluating implementation performance.

CONCLUSION

This study reconceptualises urban planning evaluation by positioning *tayyib* as an ethical layer that operates alongside regulatory compliance and sustainability performance. The proposed framework clarifies that legal conformity, while necessary, is insufficient to establish whether development outcomes are socially equitable, environmentally responsible, and ethically defensible. Its main conceptual contribution lies in translating *tayyib* into evaluative dimensions that can be used to assess environmental integrity, spatial justice, housing equity, community well-being, and governance accountability. In practical terms, the framework may guide local authorities in introducing an additional post-compliance filter during development control and, where relevant, in post-approval monitoring. The study remains conceptual, however, and the framework has not yet been empirically validated. Future research should therefore test the indicators in real planning cases, examine their feasibility across different local authority contexts, and identify appropriate thresholds for ethical sufficiency. Overall, the framework advances a more holistic model of planning governance by linking legality, sustainability, and ethics within a single evaluative structure.

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