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# A Comparative Analysis of Urban Cultural Policies through the Lens of Creative Industries: The Cases of Isfahan and Melbourne

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**Abstract:** This research looks at urban cultural policies using a comparative study approach of the creative and cultural industry's development in Isfahan, Iran, and Melbourne Australia. According to the results, it is clear that Melbourne has a more developed policy regarding collaborative governance, inclusiveness of infrastructure, and policies aimed at the creative economy, which is in line with the city's strategic intention to market itself as a world class creative city. As opposed to Isfahan, which tends to concentrate more on the preservation of cultural heritage and nurturing the traditional art forms, with some emerging but not well integrated support for contemporary creative industries within the cultural policy framework. Both cities, despite their different historical and socio-political contexts, acknowledge, each in their own way, the importance of creativity towards urban resilience and economic diversification. The study enhances the literature on local cultural policies by illustrating how they can be shaped by all-encompassing overarching political, economic, and social situations, providing useful information to policymakers, planners, and cultural managers. On the other side, by analyzing the strengths and challenges in each individual city, the research offers a better perspective to form systematic inclusive cultural policies in multi-ethnic urban settings. As interest around the world regarding creativity and cultural industries in the context of the sustainable development of cities focuses, how various cities design and execute these policies has become crucial. This research uses a mixed method approach, which includes qualitative expert interviews and AHP as well as SEM quantitative analysis. The data collection involved initial semi-structured interviews with cultural policymakers and stakeholders from both cities, followed by a survey administered with a set of relevant indicators.

**Keywords:** Cultural policies, creative and cultural industries, analytic hierarchy process (AHP).

## Introduction

Today, with their growing size, cities need to review many urban and urbanization principles with an emphasis on sustainable development. Many city managers try to use innovative and creative approaches to provide urban services to residents and attract more tourists in order to create an effective economic cycle (Miller, 2009). From this point of view, the creative city is a topic that was receiving the attention of researchers and city managers for years. The creative city seeks to create new, diverse and creative approaches for greater flexibility in providing services with a new look at urban areas (Rodríguez-Gutiérrez et al., 2020). Meanwhile, one of the most important indicators of sustainable development of any city crystallizes in the form of creative and cultural industries of that city. The creative city should be organized, implemented and designed in a way that will ultimately be an important supporter for the development of cultural industries. In this case, it can be expected that creative cultural industries will be built in cities, which can ultimately lead to the creation and development of urban creativity. Among the discussions related to urban creative industries, creative economy has also been raised (Kozina et al., 2021).

Creative economy is closely related to creative and cultural industries. The term “cultural industries” was popular since the 1980s and refers to those forms of cultural production and consumption that have a symbolic or expressive element in their heart (Cozzolino, 2019). The concept was then expanded worldwide by UNESCO and its definition gradually included a wide range of industries: music, art, writing, fashion and design, media, as well as handicraft production (Gathen et al., 2021). However, since 1990s, the term “creative and cultural industries” has also been used, which refers to very large production that includes goods and services produced by cultural industries and products related to innovation (Caragliu & Del Bo, 2019). Ever since the term "creative economy" was popularized in 2001, industries have increasingly paid attention to the term and the cultural characteristics and creativity in production and economic growth based on it. Globally, as stated in the "Creative Economy Report" (2013), such an economy generated 2.2 trillion USD worldwide in 2000 and is experiencing an annual growth rate of 5% (Comunian & England, 2020). Regarding the European scenario, Europe is very interested in cultural and creative industries because they are a source of economic growth: as emphasized in the European Creative Industries Summit report, cultural and creative sectors account for nearly 4.5% of creative industries. The European economy is performing well in this area, thanks to the nearly 1.4 million small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that produce and distribute creative content across Europe. The cultural and creative sectors have shown great resilience during the crisis – indeed, they have continued to grow. Around 8.5 million people are employed in the creative sectors across Europe, and their impact on such sectors as tourism and IT is even greater (Towse, 2019). Integrating cultural dimensions into sustainability planning plays a critical role in shaping smart and resilient cities, especially in diverse regional contexts (Ibrahim et al., 2025). Urban cultural policies aligned with sustainability objectives are increasingly essential in managing creative infrastructure and economic resilience (Kadaei et al., 2021). In this context, special attention should be paid to the double effects created by the cultural economy and its positive impact on employment. In fact, cultural and creative industries as well as the historical, artistic and architectural heritage sectors, performing arts and visual arts can become the basis for the growth of employment in different countries, which can ultimately help the urban economy (Scott, 2017; Kalfas et al, 2024).

Due to having some strengths and capabilities in the field of producing local industries, especially handicrafts and pop arts, in 2015, Isfahan joined the network of creative cities of the world in order to generate new ideas to face the cultural and urban challenges by investing in creative and efficient industries and benefiting from initiative and innovation (Mahkouii & Shirani, 2020), (Molaei, 2023). The cultural policies can be examined in the area of Isfahan in order to develop creative and cultural industries. In fact, in the review of the documents and evidences presented by the art departments and the trustees related to the cultural industries, it is not possible to see integrated and precise policies regarding the development of creative cultural industries in Isfahan. In addition, according to the researcher, the existing policies need an important rethinking (Shahivandi, 2018).

In this direction, the comparison between what is happening in the creative cultural industries of Isfahan with an active and reputable city in the related field can be useful as a model for better formulation and rethinking of these policies in the form of a model. This is a topic that was paid less attention in the research related to the creative city and culture

industries in Iran. On the other hand, many cities in Iran and the countries of the Middle East have tried to create the necessary ground for the development of these industries by developing their cultural policies in the field of cultural industries, and from this point of view, help the development of their cultural economy (Zali et al., 2015), (Pourzakarya et al., 2023). Accordingly, the growing attention to creative and cultural industries in cities has led to the creation of a competitive environment. Isfahan, in order to remain in this field of cultural economy competition, should try to acquire a competitive advantage among the cities of the world and the region by updating and developing cultural concepts and policies in the cities, and as it was stated, in the first place, it should compile correct policies in this area to achieve such a goal. In this regard, the main goal of this research is to rethink the city's cultural policies in terms of creative and cultural industries, comparing Isfahan and Melbourne. Therefore, the main research question is: How do cultural policies in Isfahan and Melbourne differ in fostering creative and cultural industries? This study aims to provide a comparative framework to guide cultural policymaking in cities with diverse socio-cultural contexts.

## Methodology

In terms of its purpose, the current work is considered as an applied research and among hybrid studies. The current research method is a qualitative-quantitative survey that leads to the implementation of a mathematical and quantitative model, because without previous knowledge, we will use an image of the existing situation and what was proposed as the components of creative and cultural industries in other researches. The components are prioritized by experts and classified based on the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) technique. AHP is one of the powerful methodologies for solving multi-criteria decision-making problems, which was presented by Saaty (2004). This methodology provides the possibility of formulating the problem in a hierarchical manner and also allows the consideration of quantitative criteria in the problem. In the weighting phase of the conceptual model of the research, to collect the required information regarding the importance of each of the dimensions, components and indicators, professors of the fields of economics and cultural management and cultural managers were referred as experts. For this purpose, 30 questionnaires were distributed and in total, among the returned questionnaires, 25 questionnaires were found suitable in terms of extraction and analysis.

Besides, the present study is among the field researches in which we have collected the required primary data in the form of interviews. In this article, the quantitative aspect was paid into attention, therefore, the statistical population in this aspect includes all people working in cultural industries in the two investigated cities. The sample size was determined by using Morgan's table, 16 people in Isfahan and 7 people in Melbourne. The sampling method was random simple.

In this research, after identifying the components of a creative city by using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and factor analysis, the model was fitted and the status of the examined indicators was compared between the two cities of Melbourne and Isfahan. The software packages used in this research were MAXQDA, AMOS and SPSS.

## Results

The results of present study are divided into two sections of qualitative and quantitative results.

### 1. Qualitative

The results obtained from the literature review and qualitative study as well as in-depth interviews conducted with relevant experts, managers and assistants led to the development of the final model and variables of the final research model. These variables of the final research model are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Variables of the final research model

Indicator	Isfahan	Melbourne
<b>Effective factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Geographical location</li> <li>▪ Adjacency</li> <li>▪ Cultural facilities and infrastructure</li> <li>▪ Political support</li> <li>▪ Managers' support</li> <li>▪ Terms and Conditions</li> <li>▪ The economic situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Geographical location</li> <li>▪ Adjacency</li> <li>▪ Cultural facilities and infrastructure</li> <li>▪ Managers' support</li> <li>▪ Terms and Conditions</li> <li>▪ The economic situation</li> <li>▪ Cultural maturity</li> </ul>

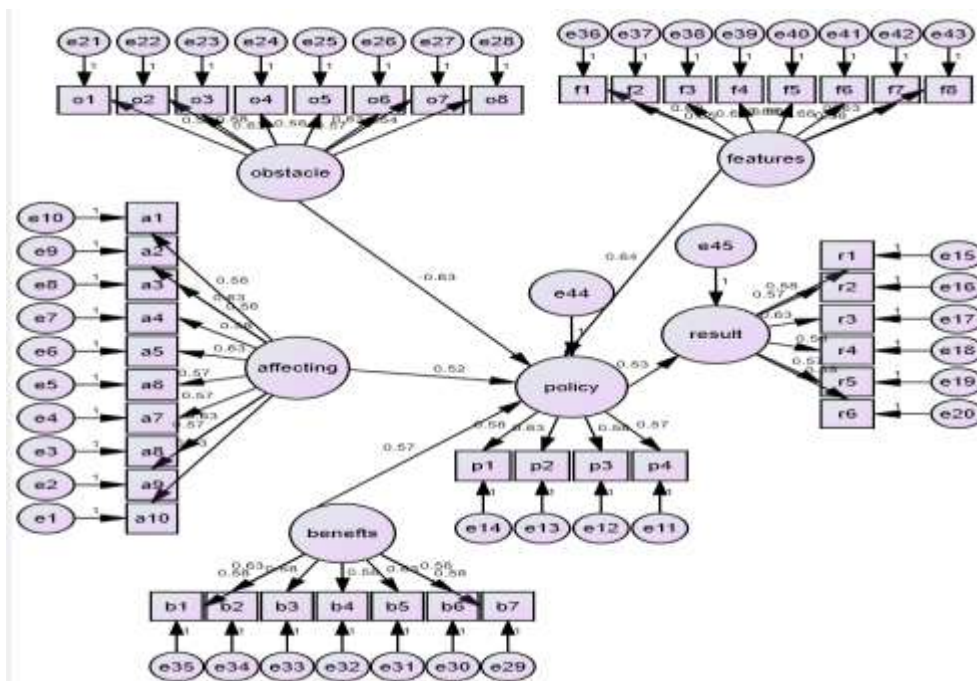
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural maturity</li> <li>▪ Features of the activity</li> <li>▪ Market capabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Features of the activity</li> <li>▪ Market capabilities</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural policies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Policy based on creative centers</li> <li>▪ Policy based on the creative class</li> <li>▪ Policy based on creative production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Policy based on the creative class</li> <li>▪ Neoliberalism policy</li> </ul>
<b>Expected functions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural diversity</li> <li>▪ Development of tendency to consume</li> <li>▪ Development of contribution</li> <li>▪ Development of cultural economy</li> <li>▪ Development of competitiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural diversity</li> <li>▪ Development of contribution</li> <li>▪ Development of cultural economy</li> <li>▪ Development of competitiveness</li> </ul>
<b>Barriers of cultural policies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Management and organizational barriers</li> <li>▪ Marketing and branding barriers</li> <li>▪ Educational and skill barriers</li> <li>▪ Economic and environmental barriers</li> <li>▪ Barriers related to the required facilities</li> <li>▪ Financial limitations</li> <li>▪ Limited access</li> <li>▪ Legal and law barriers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Management and organizational barriers</li> <li>▪ Marketing and branding barriers</li> <li>▪ Educational and skill barriers</li> <li>▪ Economic barriers</li> <li>▪ Financial limitations</li> <li>▪ Limited access</li> <li>▪ Legal and law barriers</li> </ul>
<b>Advantages of creative and cultural industries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Economic Growth</li> <li>▪ Cultural diversity</li> <li>▪ Natural tourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Economic Growth</li> <li>▪ Cultural diversity</li> <li>▪ Social solidarity</li> <li>▪ Level of Education</li> <li>▪ Natural tourism</li> <li>▪ Diplomatic relations</li> <li>▪ City branding</li> </ul>
<b>Features of creative cultural industries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Industries software features</li> <li>▪ Feature of cultural development</li> <li>▪ Personality characteristics</li> <li>▪ Feature of service quality</li> <li>▪ Technological features</li> <li>▪ Innovation and creativity in production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural development features</li> <li>▪ Personality characteristics</li> <li>▪ Employing skilled and creative people</li> <li>▪ Networking features</li> <li>▪ Quality of Service</li> <li>▪ Innovation and creativity in production</li> </ul>

## 2. Quantitative

Based on the information in Table (2) and Figure (1), in the structural model, the factor loadings of the components with the main indicators are significant. The results of the table indicate the existence of a relationship between the hidden and visible components, because the presented factor loading values were higher than 0.3.

**Table 2.** Confirmatory factor analysis of the model including advantages, characteristics, effective factors and barriers of cultural policies

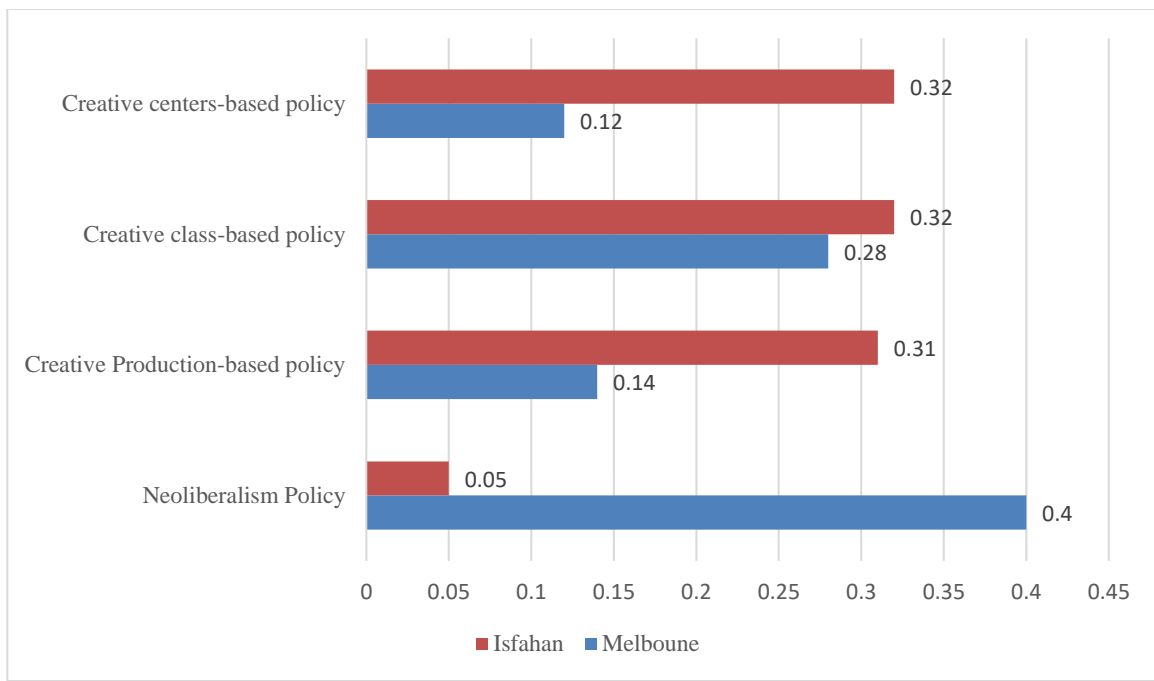
Components	Factor loading	Critical ratio	Sig	Status
Effective factors and cultural policies	0.52	6.12	0.001	Approved
Benefits and cultural policies	0.57	6.18	0.001	Approved
Cultural barriers and policies	0.63	7.12	0.001	Approved
Cultural characteristics and policies	0.64	7.13	0.001	Approved
Cultural policies and expected functions	0.53	6.14	0.001	Approved



**Figure 1.** Fitted measurement model (confirmatory factor analysis) based on standard coefficients

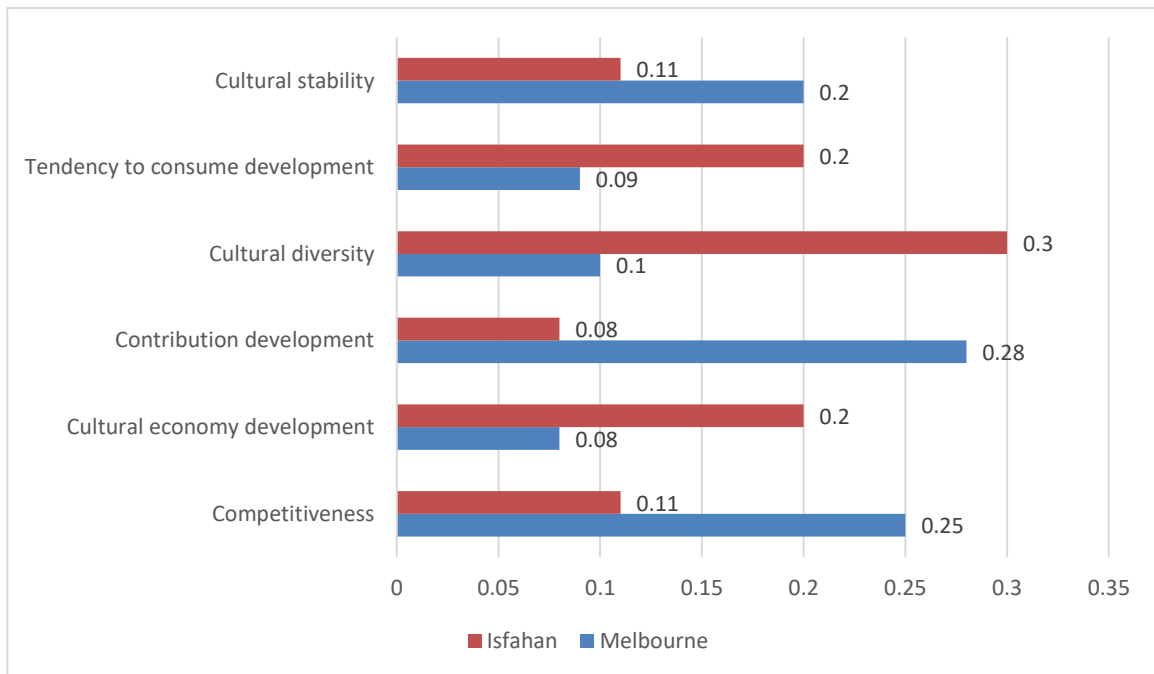
According to Table 2 and the graph above, the fitness of the model was evaluated. As it can be seen in Table 2, the value of the RMSEA index is 0.044 and the chi-square index on the degree of freedom is 2.59, both of which are within their standard limits, indicating that the measured model has a good fit.

After the fitness of the model was confirmed, AHP was used to investigate the priority of the indicators related to the prevailing cultural policies in the two cities Melbourne and Isfahan. The findings showed that the dominant politics in the city of Melbourne is a combination of neoliberalism and a focus on the creative class. Meanwhile, in the city of Isfahan, the focus is on the concepts of creative industries, creative centers and the creative class (Figure 2).



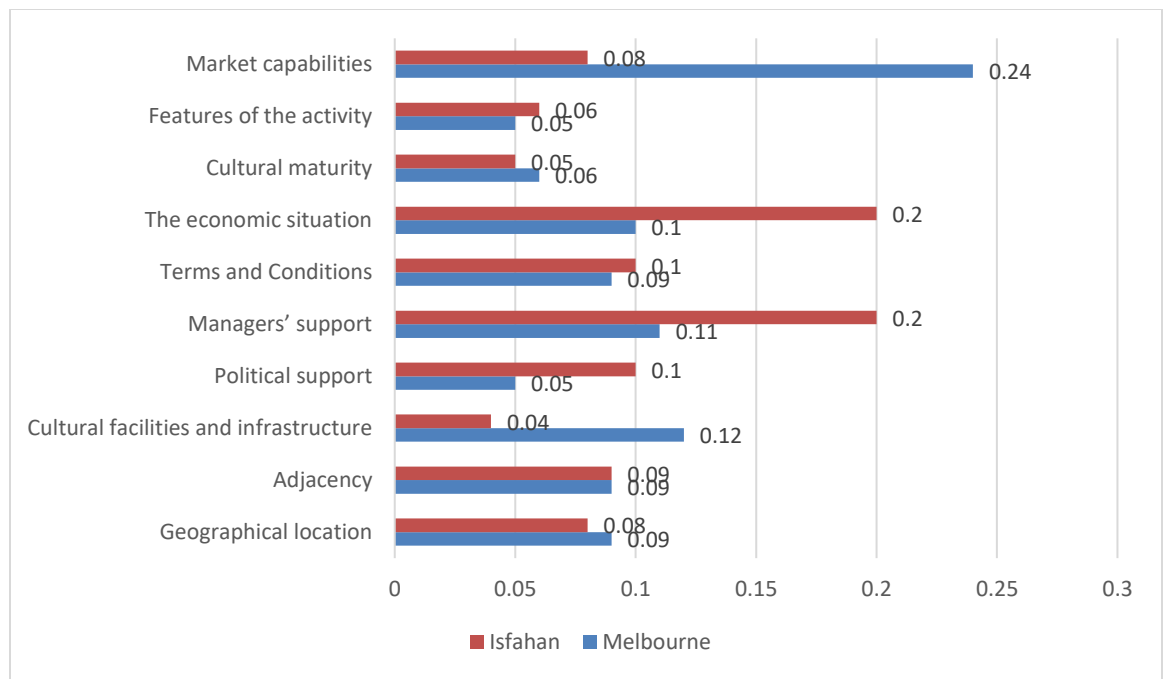
**Figure 2.** Prioritizing the sub-dimensions of cultural policies

The results of the experts' responses analysis was presented as the sub-indexes of the functions in Figure 3. A comparison between the two cities of Isfahan and Melbourne in terms of the expected functions showed that Melbourne is more focused on collaborative functions and the development of competition based on its competitive policies; while in Isfahan, the focus is more on cultural diversity and economic development in cultural industries (Figure 3).



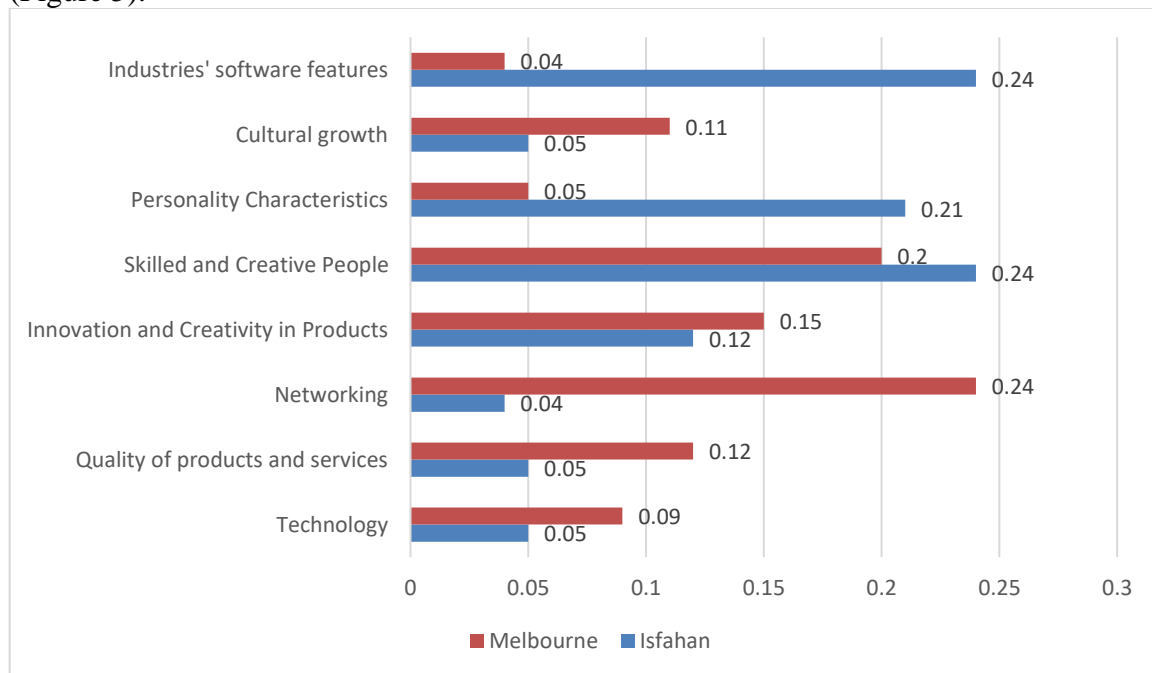
**Figure 3.** Prioritizing the sub-dimensions of expected functions

The results of prioritizing the sub-dimensions of the effective factors using the AHP showed that the state of market capabilities, cultural infrastructure and the support of managers in Melbourne have a higher priority. Meanwhile, in Isfahan, the support of managers and the economic situation have the highest weight in creative and cultural industries (Figure 4).



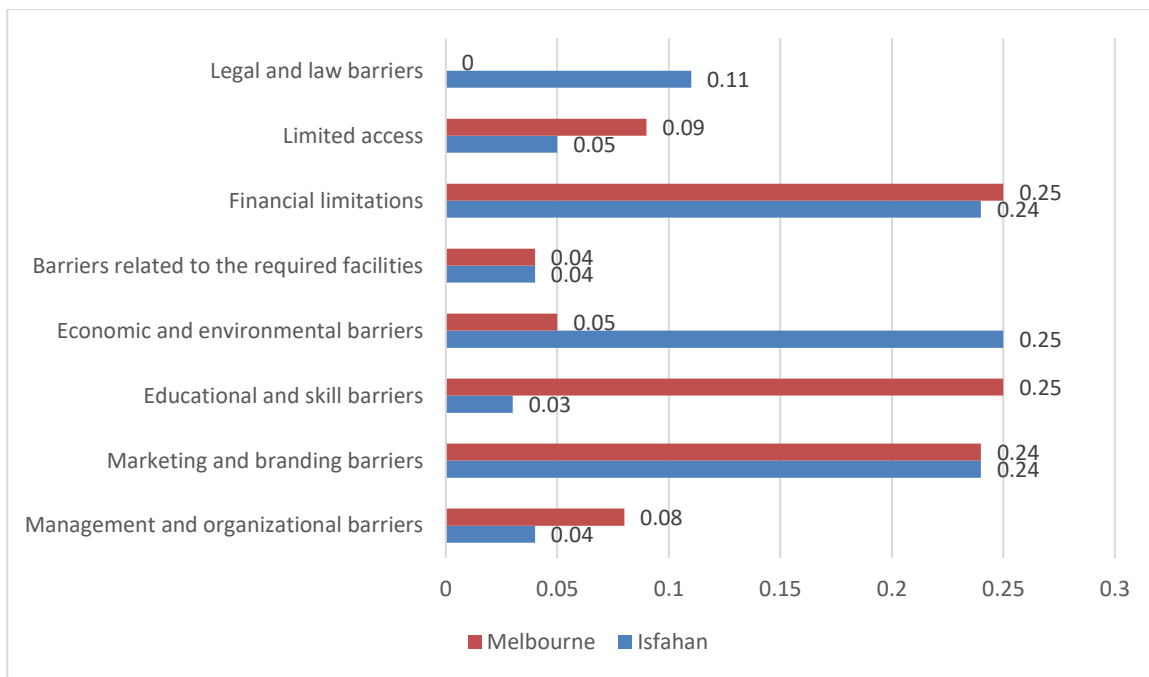
**Figure 4.** Prioritizing the sub-dimensions of effective factors

The comparison of the prioritization of the sub-dimensions of the features between Melbourne and Isfahan showed that in Isfahan, the features of the used software, the skilled and creative people, and personality characteristics have highest priority, while in Melbourne, the features networking and skilled and creative people have the highest priority (Figure 5).



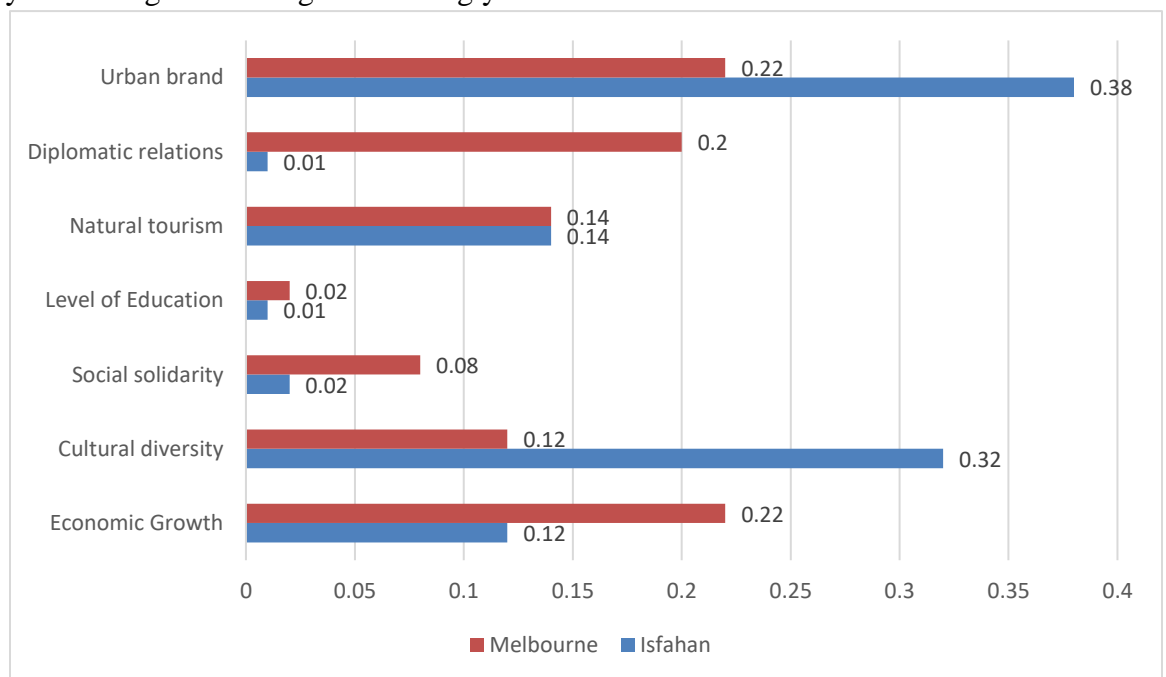
**Figure 5.** Prioritizing the sub-dimensions of features

Research findings related to the prioritization of the sub-dimensions of barriers to cultural industries have shown that financial restrictions, education, marketing and branding are the most important barriers in Melbourne. Meanwhile, in Isfahan, economic, financial and marketing barriers are the most important ones in the development of creative and cultural industries (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Prioritizing the sub-dimensions of barriers

The AHP findings regarding the prioritization of the advantages of creative and cultural industries showed that in Melbourne, city brand, diplomatic relations and economic growth have the greatest weight; while in Isfahan, city brand and cultural diversity have the greatest weight accordingly.



**Figure 7.** Prioritizing the advantages of creative and cultural industries

## Discussion

Regarding our studies on Isfahan, it can be stated that in this section, the focus was on the factors influencing the creative industries. In fact, these factors highlight the effective indicators of the implementation of creative and cultural industries. As mentioned in the cultural policies section, different cities define cultural policies in their industries based on their specific cultural approaches. The approaches of neoliberalism and post-industrial are the two main axes of policies in different cities of the world, which are most welcome in this field. Neoliberalism policies



used the development of cultural industries as a tool for the reconstruction of cities, that is, the basis of the development of these cities based on cultural industries (Booyens, 2012). The second category of policies is based on the post-industrial approach. This approach, as stated, is characterized by the transition from a production-based economy to a service-based economy, a transition that is also related to the subsequent social restructuring (Merwin et al., 2022). Based on the conducted interviews, all the interviewers believed that the dominant approach to creative and cultural industries in Isfahan is currently post-industrial. This is because it has moved towards becoming a service-oriented business, cultural jobs have moved towards becoming professional, the use of new creative solutions has grown in cultural industries, and new technologies were used in these industries in recent years. According to Gee (2014), these are all signs of a trans-industrial approach to the field of cultural industries. These aspects indicate the current approach in Isfahan.

Finally, the results of this research led to the identification of three main policies based on the creative class, creative production and creative centers. These are the policies proposed by researchers in the general categories of industries and creative cities (Wu et al., 2022). The important point is that based on the opinions of the interviewees, each of these policies can be put forward in a dominant and prioritized manner based on the classification of the type of cultural creative industries. Therefore, it can be stated that the use of policies based on people, production or creative cultural places should have a precise typology of the desired industries and these policies should fit with the type of industry in Isfahan.

Research findings related to the expected functions, indicators such as urban sustainability, cultural diversity, development of consumption, development of contributions, economic status and competitiveness were proposed as functional indicators expected from the implementation of cultural policies in Isfahan. In this regard, it can be stated that diversity in industries, activists, and consumers was addressed. Regarding sustainability, cultural sustainability, development of creative industries, and sustainability of cultural creative industries were mentioned. Regarding the consumer tendency, the related components were proposed in the form of the desire to consume cultural goods and the desire to buy these goods. Regarding the contribution, the issue of participation in creative industries was discussed with two real and legal approaches.

On the other hand, regarding the economic development, the development of incomes, increase in market share, and increased exports were discussed. Finally, regarding the competitiveness, competitive advantage and competitive power were emphasized as sub-components of economic development. In this context, it is noteworthy to mention that city managers and officials should finally adopt policies based on production, class and creative place in a dominant or mixed manner based on the knowledge of the basic approach in the policy making needed in Isfahan for the creative and cultural industries. In this regard, understanding the factors that can affect the implementation of these policies can be useful for experts, which are mentioned in this research. At the end, managers and related officials can finally evaluate the implementation of cultural policies in creative and cultural industries with the functional indicators stated here.

The results of this research regarding Melbourne have shown an important difference in the opinion of experts related to the advantages of this city as well as the policies and features that can be effective on the creative and cultural industries compared to Isfahan. Regarding the effective factors and barriers, considering that these aspects can be close to each other in both cities or any other city, no significant difference was observed. Regarding the policies, the results of this research indicate that the policy of neoliberalism with a combination of concentration on creative class and people and citizens with artistic and cultural creativity can be considered as a dominant policy in this city.

With respect to the advantages of Melbourne in terms of cultural and creative industries, it can be stated that one of these advantages point to the economic growth. In fact, Melbourne has been facing high economic growth in recent years, which has caused many industries, especially cultural industries, to provide the basis for their development in light of this industrial growth. On the other hand, the diversity of immigrants to Melbourne has caused the cultural diversity to grow strongly in this city. This cultural diversity has increased the diversity of cultural products. Social solidarity is one of the issues that has always been paid into attention by officials of Melbourne. Social solidarity refers to the feeling of togetherness and mutual support among members of a community.

In the context of Melbourne's cultural industries, social solidarity can take many forms. For example, artists and cultural organizations may come together to support better working conditions and more funding for the arts.

In the results of this research, it was stated that diplomatic relations are considered as an advantage in Melbourne. In this regard, it should be stated that diplomatic relations and foreign policy play a significant role in the development

of cultural industries in Melbourne by creating opportunities for international cooperation and contributions. These collaborations can include joint film and television productions, joint production of theater and dance shows, and visual and performing arts exhibitions. Foreign policy can also help open up markets for Melbourne's cultural industries, making it easier for Melbourne-based artists, performers and cultural institutions to showcase their work internationally. In addition, diplomatic relations can help attract international investment in Melbourne's cultural industries and provide funding for new productions and exhibitions. Overall, diplomatic relations and foreign policy can play a key role in supporting the growth and sustainability of Melbourne's cultural industries.

City branding can play an important role in the development of cultural industries in Melbourne by creating a positive image and reputation for the city. It can lead to attract tourists and businesses to the city and increase the demand for cultural products and services. In addition, city branding can also help establish Melbourne as a creative and cultural hub, which can attract and retain talented artists, musicians and other creative professionals. By promoting Melbourne's rich cultural heritage and diverse creative scene, city branding can also help support and sustain local cultural industries.

#### Conclusion:

In this study, the components and indicators of cultural creative industries were firstly measured and classified based on AHP using opinions of experts and it was determined that the expected functions of the city of Melbourne are more focused on collaborative functions and the development of competition based on competitive policies. While in Isfahan, more emphasis is placed on cultural diversity and economic development in cultural industries. In addition, in Melbourne, the status of market capabilities, cultural infrastructure and the support of managers have a higher priority. Meanwhile, in Isfahan, the support of managers and the economic situation have the highest weight in creative and cultural industries.

Regarding the features of creative and cultural industries, in Isfahan, the features including the used software, skilled and creative people, and personality characteristics have higher priority, while in Melbourne, the features including networking, the skilled and creative people have the highest priority. In terms of barriers, financial limitations, education, marketing and branding are the most important ones in Melbourne. Meanwhile, in Isfahan, economic, financial and marketing barriers are the most important ones in the development of creative and cultural industries.

On the other hand, in terms of the ranking the city's advantages, in Melbourne, diplomatic relations and economic growth have the greatest weight; and in Isfahan, city branding and cultural diversity have the greatest weight accordingly.

In addition, the results showed that the dominant policy in Melbourne is a combination of neoliberalism and a focus on the creative class. Meanwhile, in Isfahan, the focus is on the concepts of creative industries, creative centers and the creative class.

In this regard, the followings are suggested according to this study:

1. Government funding and support: Governments can provide funding and support for the development of creative and cultural industries through programs such as grants, tax incentives and subsidies.
2. Education: Providing educational and training programs in fields such as design, film, music and writing can help develop the skills and talents needed for the creative and cultural industries.
3. Infrastructures and Facilities: Building infrastructures such as theaters, museums and recording studios can provide the physical space needed for the development of creative and cultural industries.
4. Public and private contributions: Cooperation with the private sector can help attract more resources and expertise for the development of creative and cultural industries in Isfahan.

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